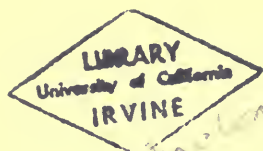


LIVELIHOOD

DRAMATIC REVERIES

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON



*J. B. C. Macdonald*

*1977*





# LIVELIHOOD



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
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# LIVELIHOOD

DRAMATIC REVERIES

BY

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
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*BY THE SAME WRITER*

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BATTLE (1915) . . . *Third Thousand*  
BORDERLANDS (1914)  
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ELKIN MATHEWS

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## TO AUDREY

AUDREY, these men and women I have known  
I have brought together in a book for you,  
So that my child some day when she is grown  
May know the friendly folk her father knew.

Wondering how fathers can be so absurd,  
Perhaps you'll take it idly from the shelves,  
And, reading, hear, as once I overheard,  
These men and women talking to themselves ;

And so find out how they faced life and earned,  
As you one day must earn, a livelihood,  
And how, in spite of everything, they learned  
To take their luck through life and find it good.

And, maybe, as you share each hope and fear,  
And all the secrets that they never told,  
For their sake you'll forgive your father, dear,  
Almost for being so absurd and old.

And may it somewhat help to make amends  
To think that, in their sorrow and their mirth,  
Such men and women were your father's friends  
In old incredible days before your birth.

THE OLD NAIL-SHOP, 1916.



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## NOTE

MOST of the poems in this volume were imagined, and the greater number of them written, before August 1914; but the War has inevitably modified my original conception of the series as a whole. "Between the Lines" is restored to its place by kind leave of Mr. Elkin Mathews, the publisher of my small volume, *Battle*, in which it was first printed.

W. W. G.



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## PRELUDE

### THE OLD NAIL-SHOP

I DREAMT of wings—and waked to hear  
Through the low-sloping ceiling clear  
The nesting starlings flutter and scratch  
Among the rafters of the thatch,  
Not twenty inches from my head ;  
And lay, half dreaming in my bed,  
Watching the far elms—bolt-upright,  
Black towers of silence in a night  
Of stars—between the window-sill  
And the low-hung eaves, square-framed, until  
I drowsed, and must have slept a wink . . .  
And wakened to a ceaseless clink  
Of hammers ringing on the air . . .  
And, somehow, only half aware,  
I'd risen and crept down the stair,  
Bewildered by strange, smoky gloom,  
Until I'd reached the living-room  
That once had been a nail-shop shed.  
And where my hearth had blazed, instead  
I saw the nail-forge glowing red ;

And, through the stife and smoky glare,  
Three dreaming women standing there  
With hammers beating red-hot wire  
On tinkling anvils, by the fire,  
To ten-a-penny nails ; and heard—  
Though none looked up or breathed a word—  
The song each heart sang to the tune  
Of hammers, through a summer's noon,  
When they had wrought in that red glow,  
Alive, a hundred years ago—  
The song of girl and wife and crone,  
Sung in the heart of each alone . . .

The dim-eyed crone with nodding head—  
“ He's dead ; and I'll, too, soon be dead.”

The grave-eyed mother, gaunt with need—  
“ Another little mouth to feed ! ”

The black-eyed girl, with eyes alight—  
“ I'll wear the yellow beads to-night.”



## THE SHAFT

HE must have lost his way, somehow.

'Twould seem

He'd taken the wrong turning, back a bit,

After his lamp. . . . Or was it all a dream

That he'd nigh reached the cage—his new  
lamp lit

And swinging in his hand, and whistling, glad

To think the shift was over—when he'd  
tripped

And stumbled, like the daft, club-footed lad

His mother called him ; and his lamp had  
slipped

And smashed to smithereens, and left him  
there

In pitchy dark, half-stunned, and with barked  
shins ?

He'd cursed his luck ; although he didn't care,

Not overmuch : you suffered for your sins :

And, anyway, he must be nigh the shaft ;

And he could fumble his way out somehow,

If he were last, and none came by. 'Twas  
daft

To do a trick like thon.

And even now  
His mother would be waiting. How she'd  
laugh  
To hear about it ! She was always game  
For fun, she was, and such a one for chaff—  
A fellow had no chance. But 'twas the same  
With women always : you could never tell  
What they'd be at, or after saying next :  
They'd such queer, tricky tongues ; and it  
was well  
For men to let them talk when they were  
vexed—  
Although, his mother, she was seldom cross.  
But she'd be wondering, now, ay, that she  
would—  
Hands folded in her apron, at a loss  
To know what kept him, even now she stood,  
Biting her lips, he'd warrant. She aye bit  
Her lips till they were white when things  
went wrong.  
She'd never liked his taking to the pit,  
After his father 'd . . . Ay, and what a song  
She'd make . . . and supper cold ! It must  
be late.  
The last on the last shift ! After to-day  
The pit was being laid idle ! Jack, his mate,  
Had left him, tidying—hurrying away  
To back. . . . And no night-shift. . . .  
If that cursed lamp  
Had not gone out. . . . But that was hours  
ago—

How many hours he couldn't tell. The  
cramp  
Was in his thighs. And what could a lad  
know  
Who'd crawled for hours upon his hands and  
knees  
Through miles on miles of hot, black, drip-  
ping night  
Of low-roofed, unfamiliar galleries?  
He'd give a hundred pound to stand upright  
And stretch his legs a moment: but, somehow,  
He'd never reached a refuge, though he'd felt  
The walls on either hand. He'd bumped his  
brow  
Till he was dizzy. And the heat would melt  
The marrow in his bones. And yet he'd gone  
A dozen miles at least, and hadn't found  
Even a crossway. On and on and on  
He'd crawled and crawled; and never caught  
a sound  
Save water dripping, dripping, or the creak  
Of settling coal. If he could only hear  
His own voice even; but he dared not speak  
Above a whisper. . . .  
There was naught to fear;  
And he was not afraid of aught, not he!  
He would come on a shaft before he knew—  
He couldn't miss. The longest gallery  
Must end somewhere or other; though 'twas  
true  
He hadn't guessed the drift could be so long.

If he had not come straight. . . . If he had  
turned,  
Unknowing, in the dark. . . . If he'd gone  
wrong  
Once, then why not a dozen times! It burned  
His very heart to tinder, just to think  
That he, maybe, was crawling round and  
round  
And round and round, and hadn't caught a  
blink  
Of light at all, or hadn't heard a sound. . . .  
'Twas queer, gey queer. . . .

Or was he going daft,  
And only dreaming he was underground  
In some black pit of hell, without a shaft—  
Just one long gallery that wound and wound,  
Where he must crawl for ever with the drip  
Of lukewarm water drumming on his back. . . .

'Twas nightmare, surely, had him in its grip.  
His head was like to split, his spine to  
crack. . . .

If he could only call, his mother'd come  
And shake him; and he'd find himself in  
bed. . . .

She'd joke his fright away. . . . But he was  
dumb,

And couldn't shout to save himself. . . .  
His head

Seemed full of water, dripping, dripping,  
dripping. . . .

And he, somehow, inside it—huge and dark  
His own skull soared above him. . . . He  
    kept slipping,  
And clutching at the crumbling walls. . . .  
    A spark  
Flared suddenly ; and to a blood-red blaze  
His head was bursting ; and the pain would  
    break. . . .

'Twas solid coal he'd run against, adaze—  
Coal, sure enough. And he was broad awake,  
And crawling still through that unending  
    drift  
Of some old working, long disused. He'd  
    known  
That there were such. If he could only lift  
His head a moment ; but the roof of stone  
Crushed low upon him. A gey narrow seam  
He must be in—and bad to work : no doubt  
That's why 'twas given up. He'd like to  
    scream,  
His cut knees hurt so sorely ; but a shout  
Might bring the crumbling roof down on his  
    head  
And squash him flat.

                                    If he could only creep  
Between the cool, white sheets of his own bed,  
And turn towards the wall, and sleep and  
    sleep—  
And dream, maybe, of pigeons soaring high,  
Turning and tumbling in the morning light,

With wings ashimmer in a cloudless sky.  
He'd give the world to see a bonnie flight  
Of his own pigeons rise with flapping wings,  
Soaring and sweeping almost out of sight,  
Till he was dizzy, watching the mad things  
Tossing and tumbling at that dazzling height.  
Ay, and his homers, too—if they'd come in,  
He hoped his mother'd fed them. They  
    would be  
Fair famished after such a flight, and thin.

But she would feed them, sure enough ; for  
    she  
Liked pigeons too—would stand there at  
    the door  
With arms akimbo, staring at the blue,  
Her black eyes shining as she watched them  
    soar,  
Without a word, till they were out of view.  
And how she laughed to hear them scold and  
    pout,  
Ruffle and fuss—like menfolk, she would say:  
Nobody knowing what 'twas all about,  
And least of all themselves. That was her  
    way,  
To joke and laugh the tantrums out of him.  
He'd tie his neckerchief before the glass ;  
And she'd call him her pigeon, Peter Prim,  
Preening himself, she'd say, to meet his lass—  
Though he'd no lass, not he ! A scarf well  
    tied,

No gaudy colours, just a red or yellow,  
Was what he fancied. What harm if he tried  
To keep himself respectable ! A fellow—  
Though womenfolk might laugh and  
laugh. . . .

And now  
He wondered if he'd hear her laugh again,  
With hands on hips and sparkling eyes. His  
brow  
Seemed clapt with red-hot iron bands ; and  
pain  
Shot red-hot needles through his legs—his  
back,

A raw and aching spine that bore the strain  
Of all the earth above him : the dead black  
Unending clammy night blinding his brain  
To a black blankness shot with scarlet streaks  
Of searing lightning ; and he scarcely knew  
If he'd been crawling hours, or days, or  
weeks. . . .

And now the lightning glimmered faintly  
blue,  
And gradually the blackness paled to grey :  
And somewhere, far ahead, he caught the  
gleam  
Of light, daylight, the very light of day,  
Day, dazzling day !

Thank God, it was no dream.  
He felt a cooler air upon his face ;  
And scrambling madly for some moments  
more,

Though centuries it seemed, he reached the  
place  
Where through the chinks of the old crumb-  
ling door  
Of a disused upcast-shaft, grey ghostly light  
Strained feebly, though it seemed the sun's  
own blaze  
To eyes so long accustomed to the night  
And peering blindly through that pitchy maze.

The door dropped from its hinges — and  
upright  
He stood, at last, bewildered and adaze,  
In a strange dazzling world of flowering  
white.  
Plumed snowy fronds and delicate downy  
sprays,  
Fantastic as the feathery work of frost,  
Drooped round him from the wet walls of  
the shaft—  
A monstrous growth of mould, huge mould.  
And lost  
In wonder he stood gaping; and then laughed  
To see that living beauty—quietly  
He laughed to see it: and awhile forgot  
All danger. He would tell his mother: she  
Would scarce know whether to believe or  
not,—  
But laugh to hear how, when he came on it,  
It dazzled him. If she could only see  
That fluffy white—come on it from the pit,



Snow-white as fantails' feathers, suddenly  
As he had, she'd laugh too : she . . .  
Icy cold  
Shot shuddering through him, as he stept  
beneath  
A trickle. He looked up. That monstrous  
mould  
Frightened him ; and he stood with chatter-  
ing teeth,  
Seeming to feel it growing over him  
Already, shutting out the fleck of sky  
That up the slimy shaft gleamed far and dim.  
'Twould flourish on his bones when he should  
lie  
Forgotten in the shaft. Its clammy breath  
Was choking him already. He would die,  
And no one know how he'd come by his  
death. . . .  
Dank, cold mould growing slowly. By  
and by  
'Twould cover him ; and not a soul to  
tell. . . .

With a wild cry he tried to scramble out,  
Clutching the wall. . . . Mould covered  
him. . . . He fell,  
As, close at hand, there came an answering  
shout.

## IN THE ORCHESTRA

HE'D played each night for months, and  
never heard

A single tinkly tune, or caught a word  
Of all the silly songs and sillier jests ;  
And he'd seen nothing, even in the rests,  
Of that huge audience piled from floor to  
ceiling

Whose stacked white faces sent his dazed  
wits reeling. . . .

He'd been too happy, and had other things  
To think of while he scraped his fiddle-  
strings. . . .

But now, he'd nothing left to think about—  
Nothing he dared to think of. . . .

In and out

The hollow fiddle of his head the notes  
Jingled and jangled ; and the raucous throats  
Of every star rasped jibes into his ear,—  
Each separate syllable, precise and clear,  
As though 'twere life or death if he should  
miss

A single cackle, crow or quack, or hiss

Of cockadoodling fools. . . .

A week ago  
He'd sat beside her bed, and heard her low  
Dear voice talk softly of her hopes and fears—  
Their hopes and fears ; and every afternoon  
He'd watched her lying there. . . .

A fat buffoon  
In crimson trousers prancing, strut and  
cluck—

Cackling : " A fellow never knows his luck.  
He never knows his luck. He never knows  
His luck." . . . And in and out the old gag  
goes

Of either ear, and in and out again,  
Playing at " You-can't-catch-me " through  
his brain—

" 'Er knows his luck." . . .

How well they thought they knew  
Their luck, and such a short while since,  
they two

Together. Life was lucky : and 'twas good  
Then to be fiddling for a livelihood—  
His livelihood and hers. . . .

A woman sang  
With grinning teeth. The whole house  
rocked and rang.

In the whole house there was no empty place :  
And there were grinning teeth in every face  
Of all those faces, grinning, tier on tier,  
From orchestra to ceiling chandelier,  
That caught in every prism a grinning light,

As from the little black box up a height  
The changing limelight streamed down on  
the stage.

And he was filled with reasonless, dull rage  
To see those grinning teeth, those grinning  
rows ;

And wondered if those lips would never close,  
But gape for ever through an endless night,  
Grinning and mowing in the green limelight.

And now they seemed to grin in mockery  
Of him ; and then, as he turned suddenly  
To face them, flaming, it was his own face  
That mowed and grinned at him from every  
place—

Grimacing on him with the set, white grin  
Of his own misery through that dazzling  
din. . . .

Yet, all the while he hadn't raised his head,  
But fiddled, fiddled for his daily bread,  
His livelihood—no longer hers. . . .

And now  
He heard no more the racket and the row,  
Nor saw the aching, glittering glare, nor smelt  
The smother of hot breaths and smoke—but  
felt

A wet wind on his face. . . .

He sails again  
Home with her up the river in the rain—  
Leaving the grey domes and grey colonnades  
Of Greenwich in their wake as daylight fades—

By huge, dark, cavernous wharves with flaring  
lights,  
Warehouses built for some mad London  
night's  
Fantastic entertainment—grimmer far  
Than Baghdad dreamt of—monstrous and  
bizarre,  
They loom against the night, and seem to  
hold  
Preposterous secrets horrible and old  
Behind black doors and windows.

Yet even they  
Make magic with more mystery the way,  
As, hand in hand, they sail through the blue  
gloom  
Up the old river of enchantment, home. . . .

He heard strange, strangled voices—he, alone  
Once more—like voices through the tele-  
phone,  
Thin and unreal, inarticulate  
Twanging and clucking at terrific rate—  
Pattering, pattering. . . .

And again aware  
He grew of all the racket and the glare,  
Aware again of the antic strut and cluck—  
And there was poor old "Never-know-his-  
luck"

Doing another turn—yet, not a smile,  
Although he'd changed his trousers and his  
style.

The same old trousers and the same old  
wheeze  
Was what the audience liked. He tried to  
please,  
And knew he failed : and suddenly turned  
old  
Before those circling faces glum and cold—  
A fat old man with cracked voice piping  
thin,  
Trying to make those wooden faces grin,  
With frantic kicks and desperate wagging  
head,  
To win the applause that meant his daily  
bread—  
Gagging and prancing for a livelihood,  
His daily bread. . . .

God ! how he understood !  
He'd fiddled for their livelihood—for her,  
And for the one who never came. . . .

A stir

Upon the stage ; and now another turn—  
The old star guttered out, too old to burn.  
And he remembered she had liked the chap  
When she'd been there that night. He'd  
seen her clap,  
Laughing so merrily. She liked it all—  
The razzle-dazzle of the music-hall—  
And laughing faces . . . said she liked to  
see  
Hard-working people laughing heartily  
After the day's work. She liked everything—

His playing, even! Snap . . . another  
string—

The third!

And she'd been happy in that place,  
Seeing a friendly face in every face.

That was her way—the whole world was her  
friend.

And she'd been happy, happy to the end,  
As happy as the day was long.

And he  
Fiddled on, dreaming of her quietly.

## THE SWING

'Twas jolly, swinging through the air,  
With young Dick Garland sitting there  
Tugging the rope with might and main,  
His round face flushed, his arms astrain,  
His laughing blue eyes shining bright,  
As they went swinging through the light—  
As they went swinging, ever higher,  
Until it seemed that they came nigher  
At every swing to the blue sky—  
Until it seemed that by and by  
The boat would suddenly swing through  
That sunny dazzle of clear blue—  
And they, together. . . .

Yesterday  
She'd hardly thought she'd get away :  
The mistress was that cross, and she  
Had only told her after tea  
That ere she left she must set to  
And turn the parlour out. She knew,  
Ay, well enough, that it meant more  
Than two hours' work. And so at four  
She'd risen this morn, and done it all



Before her mistress went to call  
And batter at her bedroom door  
At six to rouse her. Such a floor,  
So hard to sweep ; and all that brass  
To polish ! Any other lass  
But her would have thrown up the place,  
And told the mistress to her face. . . .

But how could she ! Her money meant  
So much to them at home. 'Twas spent  
So quickly, though so hard to earn.  
She'd got to keep her place, and learn  
To hold her tongue. Though it was hard,  
The little house in Skinner's Yard  
Must be kept going. She would rob  
The bairns if she should lose her job,  
And they'd go hungry. . . .

Since the night  
They'd brought home father, cold and white,  
Upon a stretcher, mother and she  
Had had to struggle ceaselessly  
To keep a home together at all.  
'Twas lucky she was big and tall  
And such a strong lass for fifteen.  
She couldn't think where they'd have been  
If she'd not earned enough to feed  
And help to keep the bairns from need—  
Those five young hungry mouths. . . .

And she

For one long day beside the sea  
Was having a rare holiday. . . .

'Twas queer that Dick should want to pay  
So much good money, hardly earned,  
To bring her with him. . . .

How it burned,  
That blazing sun in the blue sky!  
And it was good to swing so high—  
So high into the burning blue,  
Until it seemed they'd swing right through. . . .

And good just to be sitting there  
And watching Dick with tumbled hair  
And his red neck-tie floating free  
Against the blue of sky and sea,  
As up and down and up and down,  
Beyond the low roofs of the town,  
They swung and swung. . . .

And he was glad  
To pay for her, the foolish lad,  
And happy to be swinging there  
With her, and rushing through the air,  
So high into the burning blue,  
It seemed that they would swing right  
through. . . .

'Twas well that she had caught the train,  
She'd had to run with might and main  
To catch it: and Dick waiting there  
With tickets ready. . . .

How his hair  
Shone in the sunshine, and the light

Made his blue laughing eyes so bright  
Whenever he looked up at her. . . .

She'd like to sit and never stir  
Again out of that easy seat—  
With no more mats to shake and beat,  
And no more floors to sweep, no stairs  
To scrub, and no more heavy chairs  
To move—for she was sleepy now. . . .

Dick's hair had fallen over his brow  
Into his eyes. He shook them free,  
And laughed to her. 'Twas queer that he  
Should think it worth his while to pay  
And give her such a holiday. . . .

But she was sleepy now. 'Twas rare  
As they were rushing through the air  
To see Dick's blue eyes shining bright  
As they went swinging through the light,  
As they went swinging ever higher  
Until it seemed that they came nigher  
At every swing to that blue sky—  
Until it seemed that by and by  
Their boat would suddenly swing through  
That sunny dazzle of clear blue. . . .

If she could swing for evermore  
With Dick above that golden shore,  
With no more parlour floors to sweep—  
If she could only swing and sleep . . .

And wake to see Dick's eyes burn bright,  
To see them laughing with delight  
As suddenly they swung right through  
That sunny dazzle of clear blue—  
And they two sailing on together  
For ever through that shining weather !

## THE DROVE-ROAD

'Twas going to snow—'twas snowing! Curse  
his luck!

And fifteen mile to travel—here was he  
With nothing but an empty pipe to suck,  
And half a flask of rum—but that would be  
More welcome later on. He'd had a drink  
Before he left; and that would keep him warm  
A tidy while: and 'twould be good to think  
He'd something to fall back on if the storm  
Should come to much. You never knew  
with snow.

A sup of rain he didn't mind at all,  
But snow was different with so far to go—  
Full fifteen mile, and not a house of call.  
Ay, snow was quite another story, quite—  
Snow on these fell-tops with a north-east wind  
Behind it, blowing steadily with a bite  
That made you feel that you were stript and  
skinned.

And those poor beasts—and they just off the  
boat

A day or so, and hardly used to land—

Still dizzy with the sea, their wits afloat.  
When they first reached the dock, they scarce  
    could stand,  
They'd been so joggled. It's gey bad to cross,  
After a long day's jolting in the train,  
Thon Irish Channel, always pitch and toss—  
And heads or tails, not much for them to gain!  
And then the market, and the throng and noise  
Of yapping dogs : and they stung mad with  
    fear,  
Welted with switches by those senseless boys—  
He'd like to dust their jackets ! But 'twas  
    queer,  
A beast's life, when you came to think of it  
From start to finish—queerer, ay, a lot  
Than any man's, and chancier a good bit.  
With his ash-sapling at their heels they'd got  
To travel before night those fifteen miles  
Of hard fell-road, against the driving snow,  
Half-blinded, on and on. He thought at  
    whiles  
'Twas just as well for them they couldn't  
    know. . . .

Though, as for that, 'twas little that he knew  
Himself what was in store for him. He took  
Things as they came. 'Twas all a man  
    could do ;  
And he'd kept going, somehow, by hook or  
    crook.  
And here he was, with fifteen mile of fell,

And snow, and . . . God, but it was blowing stiff!

And no tobacco. Blest if he could tell  
Where he had lost it—but for half a whiff  
He'd swop the very jacket off his back—  
Not that he'd miss the cobweb of old shreds  
That held the holes together.

Thon Cheap-Jack  
Who'd sold it him had said it was Lord Ted's,  
And London cut. But Teddy had grown fat  
Since he'd been made an alderman. . . . His  
bid?

And did the gentleman not want a hat  
To go with it, a topper? If he did,  
Here was the very . . .

Hell, but it was cold :  
And driving dark it was—nigh dark as night.  
He'd almost think he must be getting old  
To feel the wind so. And long out of sight  
The beasts had trotted. Well, what odds!

The way  
Ran straight for ten miles on, and they'd go  
straight.

They'd never heed a by-road. Many a day  
He'd had to trudge on, trusting them to fate,  
And always found them safe. They scamper  
fast,

But in the end a man could walk them down.  
They're showy trotters ; but they cannot last.  
He'd race the fastest beast for half-a-crown  
On a day's journey. Beasts were never made

For steady travelling : drive them twenty mile  
And they were done, while he was not afraid  
To tackle twice that distance with a smile.

But not a day like this ! He'd never felt  
A wind with such an edge. 'Twas like the  
blade

Of the rasper in the pocket of his belt  
He kept for easy shaving. In his trade  
You'd oft to make your toilet under a dyke—  
And he was always one for a clean chin,  
And carried soap.

He'd never felt the like—  
That wind, it cut clean through him to the  
skin.

He might be mother-naked, walking bare,  
For all the use his clothes were, with the snow  
Half-blinding him, and clagging to his hair,  
And trickling down his spine. He'd like to  
know

What was the sense of pegging steadily,  
Chilled to the marrow, after a daft herd  
Of draggled beasts he couldn't even see !

But that was him all over ! Just a word,  
A nod, a wink, the price of half-and-half—  
And he'd be setting out for God-knows-  
where,

With no more notion than a yearling calf  
Where he would find himself when he got  
there.



And he'd been travelling hard on sixty year  
The same old road, the same old giddy gait ;  
And he'd be walking, for a pint of beer,  
Into his coffin, one day, soon or late—  
But not with such a tempest in his teeth,  
Half-blinded and half-dothered, that he  
hoped !

He'd met a sight of weather on the heath,  
But this beat all.

'Twas worse than when he'd groped  
His way that evening down the Mallerstang—  
Thon was a blizzard, thon—and he was done,  
And almost dropping when he came a bang  
Against a house—slap-bang, and like to  
stun !—

Though that just saved his senses—and right  
there

He saw a lighted window he'd not seen,  
Although he'd nearly staggered through its  
glare

Into a goodwife's kitchen, where she'd been  
Baking hot girdlecakes upon the peat.  
And he could taste them now and feel the glow  
Of steady, aching, tingly, drowsy heat  
As he sat there and let the caking snow  
Melt off his boots, staining the sanded floor.  
And that brown jug she took down from the  
shelf—

And every time he'd finished, fetching more,  
And piping : “ Now reach up and help  
yourself ! ”

She was a wonder, thon, the gay old wife—  
But no such luck this journey. Things like  
that

Could hardly happen every day of life,  
Or no one would be dying but the fat  
And oily undertakers, starved to death  
For want of custom. . . . Hell! but he  
would soon

Be giving them a job. . . . It caught your  
breath,

That throttling wind. And it was not yet  
noon ;

And he'd be travelling through it until dark.  
Dark! 'Twas already dark, and might be  
night

For all that he could see. . . .

And not a spark  
Of comfort for him ! Just to strike a light  
And press the kindling shag down in the  
bowl,

Keeping the flame well shielded by his hand,  
And puff and puff! He'd give his very soul  
For half a pipe. He couldn't understand  
How he had come to lose it. He'd the rum—  
Ay, that was safe enough : but it would keep  
Awhile, you never knew what chance might  
come

In such a storm. . . .

If he could only sleep . . .  
If he could only sleep. . . . That rustling  
sound

Of drifting snow, it made him sleepy-like—  
Drowsy and dizzy, dithering round and  
round. . . .

If he could only curl up under a dyke  
And sleep and sleep. . . . It dazzled him,  
that white,

Drifting and drifting, round and round and  
round. . . .

Just half-a-moment's snooze. . . . He'd be  
all right.

It made his head quite dizzy, that dry sound  
Of rustling snow. It made his head go  
round—

That rustling in his ears . . . and drifting,  
drifting. . . .

If he could only sleep . . . he would sleep  
sound. . . .

God, he was nearly gone !

The storm was lifting ;  
And he'd run into something soft and warm—  
Slap into his own beasts, and never knew.

Huddled they were, bamboozled by the  
storm—

And little wonder either when it blew  
A blasted blizzard. Still, they'd got to go.  
They couldn't stand there snoozing until  
night.

But they were sniffing something in the snow.  
'Twas that had stopped them, something big  
and white—

A bundle—nay, a woman . . . and she  
slept.

But it was death to sleep.

He'd nearly dropt  
Asleep himself. 'Twas well that he had kept  
That rum ; and lucky that the beasts had  
stopt.

Ay, it was well that he had kept the rum.  
He liked his drink : but he had never cared  
For soaking by himself, and sitting mum.  
Even the best rum tasted better, shared.

## THE ROCK-LIGHT

Ay, he must keep his mind clear—must not  
think

Of those two lying dead or he'd go mad.

The glitter on the lenses made him blink ;

The brass glared speckless : work was all he  
had

To keep his mind clear. He must keep it  
clear

And free of fancies now that there was none,

None left but him to light the lantern—near

On fourteen hours yet till that blazing sun

Should drop into that quiet oily sea,

And he must light . . . though it was not  
his turn :

'Twas Jacob's,—Jacob, lying quietly

Upon his bed. . . . And yet the light would  
burn

And flash across the darkness just as though

Nothing had happened, white and innocent,

As if Jake's hand had lit it. None would  
know,

No seaman steering by it, what it meant

To him since he'd seen Jacob. . . .

But that way

Lay madness. He, at least, must keep his  
wits ;  
Or there'd be none to tell why those two  
lay . . .

He must keep working or he'd go to bits.

Ere sunset he must wind the lantern up.  
He'd like to wind it now—but 'twould go  
round,  
And he'd be fancying. . . . Neither bite  
nor sup  
He'd touched this morning ; and the clicking  
sound  
Would set his light head fancying. . . .  
Jacob wound  
So madly that last time before . . . But he,  
He mustn't think of Jacob. He was bound,  
In duty bound, to keep his own wits free  
And clear of fancies.

He would think of home.

That thought would keep him whole when  
all else failed—  
The green door ; and the doorstep, white as  
foam ;  
The window that blazed bright the night he  
sailed  
Out of the moonlit harbour,—clean and gay  
'Twould shine this morning in the sun, with  
white

Dimity curtains and a grand display  
Of red geraniums, glowing in the light.  
He always liked geraniums : such a red—  
It put a heart in you. His mother, too,  
She liked . . .

And she'd be lying still in bed,  
And never dreaming ! If she only knew !  
But he, . . . he mustn't think of them just  
now—

Must keep off fancies. . . .

She'd be lying there,  
Sleeping so quietly—her smooth white brow  
So calm beneath the wisps of silver hair  
Slipped out beneath her mutch-frills. She  
had pride

In those fine caps, and ironed them herself.  
The very morning that his father'd died,  
Drowned in the harbour, turning to the shelf  
She took her iron down, without a word,  
And ironed, with her husband lying  
dead . . .

As they were lying now. . . . He never  
heard

Her speak or saw her look towards the bed.  
She ironed, ironed. He had thought it  
queer—

The little shivering lad perched in his chair,  
And hungry—though he dared not speak for  
fear

His father'd wake, and with wet streaming  
hair

Should rise up from the bed. . . .

He'd thought it strange  
Then, but he understood now, understood.  
You'd got to work or let your fancies range ;  
And fancies played the devil when they could.  
They got the upper hand if you loosed grip  
A moment. Iron frills, or polish brass  
To keep a hold upon yourself, not slip  
As Jacob slipt. . . .

A very burning-glass  
Those lenses were. He'd have to drop off  
soon  
And find another job to fill the morn,  
And keep him going through the afternoon—  
And it was not yet five ! . . .

Ay, he was born  
In the very bed where still his mother slept,  
And where his father'd lain—a cupboard bed  
Let in the wall, more like a bunk, and kept  
Decent with curtains drawn from foot to head  
By day, though why—but 'twas the women's  
way :

They always liked things tidy. They were  
right—  
Better to keep things tidy through the day  
Or there would be the devil's mess by night.  
He liked things shipshape, too, himself. He  
took

After his mother in more ways than one.  
He'd say this for her—she could never brook  
A sloven ; and she'd made a tidy son.



'Twas well for him that he was tidy, now  
That he was left ; or how'd he ever keep  
His thoughts in hand. . . . The Lord alone  
knew how  
He'd keep them tidy, till . . .

Yet, she could sleep :  
And he was glad, ay, glad that she slept sound.  
It did him good, to think of her so still ;  
It kept his thoughts from running round and  
round  
Like Jacob in the lighted lantern, till . . .  
God ! they were breaking loose ! He must  
keep hold. . . .

On one side, "Albert Edward, Prince of  
Wales,"  
Framed in cut cork, painted to look like  
gold—

On the other a red frigate, with white sails  
Bellying, and a blue pennon fluttering free,  
Upon a sea dead calm. He couldn't think,  
As a wee lad, how ever this could be ;  
And when he'd asked, his father with a wink  
Had only answered, laughing : Little chaps  
Might think they knew a lot, and had sharp  
eyes ;

But only pigs could see the wind. Perhaps  
The painter'd no pig by him to advise.

That was his father's way : he'd always jest,  
And chuckle in his beard, with eyes half-shut

And twinkling . . . Strange to think of  
them at rest

And lightless, those blue eyes, beneath that  
cut

Where the jagged rock had gashed his brow  
—the day

His wife kept ironing those snowy frills,  
To keep herself from thinking how he lay,  
And wouldn't jest again. It's that that  
kills—

The thinking over. . . .

Jacob jested too :

He'd always some new game, was full of chaff.

The very morn before the lantern drew . . .

Yesterday morn that was, he heard him  
laugh. . . .

Yesterday morn ! And was it just last night  
He'd wakened, startled, and run out, to  
find

Jacob within the lantern, round the light

Fluttering like a moth, naked and blind

And laughing . . . Peter staring, turned to  
stone . . .

The struggle . . . Peter killed . . .

And he must keep

His mind clear at all costs, himself alone

On that grey naked rock of the great deep,

Full forty mile from shore—where there  
were men

Alive and breathing at this moment—ay,

Men deep in easy slumber even then,  
Who yet would waken and look on the sky.

He must keep his mind clear, to light the  
lamp

Ere sunset : ay, and clear the long night  
through

To tell how they had died. He mustn't  
scamp

The truth — and yet 'twas little that he  
knew . . .

What had come over Jacob in the night

To send him mad and stripping himself  
bare . . .

And how he'd ever climbed into the light—

And it revolving . . . and the heat and  
glare !

No wonder he'd gone blind — the lenses  
burning

And blazing round him ; and in each he'd see

A little naked self . . . and turning, turning,

Till, blinded, scorched, and laughing fiend-  
ishly,

He'd dropped : and Peter . . . Peter might  
have known

The truth, if he had lived to tell the tale—

But Peter'd tripped . . . and he was left  
alone. . . .

Just thirty hours till he should see the sail

Bringing them food and letters—food for them;

Letters from home for them . . . and here  
was he

Shuddering like a boat from stern to stem  
When a wave takes it broadside suddenly.  
He must keep his mind clear. . . .

His mother lay  
Peacefully slumbering. And she, poor soul,  
Had kept her mind clear, ironing that day—  
Had kept her wits about her, sound and  
whole—

And for his sake. Ay, where would he have  
been

If she had let her fancies have their way  
That morning, having seen what she had  
seen !

He'd thought it queer. . . . But it was no  
child's play

Keeping the upper hand of your own wits.  
He knew that now. If only for her sake  
He mustn't let his fancies champ their bits  
Until they foamed. . . . He must jam on  
the brake

Or he . . .

He must think how his mother slept;  
How soon she would be getting out of bed ;  
Would dress ; and breakfast by the window,  
kept

So lively with geraniums blazing red ;  
Would open the green door, and wash the  
stone,

Foam-white enough already ; then, maybe,

She'd take her iron down, and, all alone,  
Would iron, iron, iron steadily—  
Keeping her fancies quiet, till he came. . . .

To-morrow he'd be home: he'd see the  
    white  
Welcoming threshold, and the window's  
    flame,  
And her grave eyes kindling with kindly  
    light.

## THE PLOUGH

HE sniffed the clean and eager smell  
Of crushed wild garlic, as he thrust  
Beneath the fallows ; and a spell  
He stood there munching a thick crust—  
The fresh tang giving keener zest  
To bread and cheese—and watched a pair  
Of wagtails preening wing and breast,  
Then running—flirting tails in air,  
And pied plumes sleeked to silky sheen—  
Chasing each other in and out  
The wet wild garlic's white and green.

And then remembering, with a shout,  
And rattle whirring, he ran back  
Again into the Fair Maid's Mead,  
To scare the rascal thieves and black  
That flocked from far and near to feed  
Upon the sprouting grain. As one  
They rose with clapping, rustling wings—  
Rooks, starlings, pigeons, in the sun  
Circling about him in wide rings,  
And plovers hovering over him

In mazy, interweaving flight—  
Until it made his young wits swim  
To see them up against the light,  
A dazzling dance of black and white  
Against the clear blue April sky—  
Wings on wings in flashing flight  
Swooping low and soaring high—  
Swooping, soaring, fluttering, flapping,  
Tossing, tumbling, swerving, dipping,  
Chattering, cawing, creaking, clapping,  
Till he felt his senses slipping,  
And gripped his cornrake rattle tight,  
And flourished it above his head  
Till every bird was out of sight ;  
And laughed, when all had flown and fled,  
To think that he, and all alone,  
Could put so many thieves to rout.

Then sitting down upon a stone  
He wondered if the school were out—  
The school where, only yesterday,  
He'd sat at work among his mates—  
At work that now seemed children's play,  
With pens and pencils, books and slates ;  
Although he'd liked it well enough,  
The hum and scuffling of the school,  
And hadn't cared when Grim-and-Gruff  
Would call him dunderhead and fool.

And he could see them sitting there,  
His class-mates, in the lime-washed room,

With fingers inked and towzled hair—  
Bill Baxter with red cheeks abloom,  
And bright black eyes ; and Ginger Jim  
With freckled face and solemn look,  
Who'd wink a pale blue eye at him,  
Then sit intent upon his book,  
While, caught a-giggle, he was caned.

He'd liked that room, he'd liked it all—  
The window steaming when it rained ;  
The sunlight dancing on the wall  
Among the glossy charts and maps ;  
The blotchy stain beside the clock  
That only he of all the chaps  
Knew for a chart of Dead Man's Rock  
That lies in Tiger Island Bay—  
The reef on which the schooners split  
And founder, that would bear away  
The treasure-chest of Cut-Throat-Kit,  
That's buried under Black Bill's bones  
Beneath the purple pepper-tree . . .  
A trail of clean-sucked cherry-stones,  
Which you must follow carefully,  
Across the dunes of yellow sand  
Leads winding upward from the beach  
Till, with a pistol in each hand,  
And cutlass 'twixt your teeth, you reach . . .

Plumping their fat crops peacefully  
Were plovers, pigeons, starlings, rooks,  
Feeding on every side while he



Was in the land of storybooks.  
He raised his rattle with a shout  
And scattered them with yell and crake. . . .  
A man must mind what he's about  
And keep his silly wits awake,  
Not go wool-gathering, if he'd earn  
His wage. And soon, no schoolboy now,  
He'd take on a man's job, and learn  
To build a rick, and drive the plough,  
Like father. . . .

Up against the sky,  
Beyond the spinney and the stream,  
With easy stride and steady eye  
He saw his father drive his team,  
Turning the red marl gleaming wet  
Into long furrows clean and true.  
And dreaming there, he longed to set  
His young hand to the ploughshare too.

## THE OLD PIPER

WITH ears undulled of age, all night he heard  
The April singing of the Otterburn.  
His wife slept quietly and never stirred,  
Though he was restless and must toss and  
turn—

But she kept going all the day, while he  
Was just a useless bundle in a chair,  
And couldn't do a hand's turn—seventy-  
three,  
And crippled with rheumatics . . .

It was rare,  
Hearing the curlew piping in the dark !  
'Twas queer he'd got his hearing still so  
keen ;

He'd be so bothered if he couldn't hark  
To curlew piping, shrill and clear and clean—  
Ay, clean, that note !

His piping days were done,  
His fingers numb and stiff. And by the  
peat

All winter, or all summer in the sun,  
He'd sit beside the threshold, in his seat,

Day-long, and listen to the Otterburn  
That sang each day and night a different  
tune.

It knew more airs than he could ever learn  
Upon the small-pipes. January to June,  
And June to January, every hour  
It changed its music. Now 'twas shrilling  
clear

In a high tinkling treble with a power  
Of mellow undertones. And to his ear  
Even the spates of winter over stones  
Made no dull tuneless thundering : he heard  
No single roar, but half a hundred tones  
Eddying and swirling ; blending, yet un-  
blurred ;  
No dull-edged note, but each one razor-  
keen—

Though supp'e as the sword-blades interlaced  
Over the morris-dancers' heads—and clean !  
But, nay, there was no word for it. 'Twas  
waste

Of breath to try and put the thing in words,  
Though on his pipes he'd get the sense of it,  
The feel—ay, even of the calls of birds  
He'd get some notion, though dull-toned a  
bit—

His humming drone had not that quality  
Of clean-cut piping. Any shepherd lad  
Upon his penny-whistle easily  
Could mimic the mere notes. And yet he  
had

A gift of feeling, somehow. . . . He must  
try

To-morrow if he couldn't tune his pipes,  
Must get his wife to strap them carefully . . .  
Hark, a new note among the birds—a  
snipe's—

A small-pipe's note ! . . .

Drowsing, he did not wake  
Until his wife was stirring.

Nor till noon  
He told her that he'd half a mind to take  
His pipes and see if he could turn a tune  
If she would fetch them. And regretfully  
She brought the pipes and strapped them on  
and set

The bellows under his arm, and patiently  
She held the reeds to his numb fingers. Yet  
She knew 'twas worse than useless : work  
and years

Had dulled that lively touch ; each joint was  
stiff

And swollen with rheumatics. . . .

Slowly tears  
Ran down his weathered cheeks . . .

And then a whiff  
Of peat-reek filled his nostrils ; and quite  
still

He sat remembering. Memory was kind  
And stript age off him.

And along the hill  
By Golden Pots he strove against the wind—

In all his days he never again had known  
A wind like thon—on that November day.  
For every step that he took forward, blown  
Half a step backward, slowly he made way  
Against it, buffeted and battered numb,  
Chilled to the marrow, till he reached his door,  
To find Jack Dodd, the pitman piper, come  
To play a contest with him. . . .

Nevermore

There 'd be such piping !

Ay, Jack Dodd had heard  
That he could play—that up among the hills  
There was a lad could pipe like any bird,  
With half a hundred fancy turns and trills,  
And give a lead even to Jack himself,  
Jack Dodd, the pitmen's champion !

After tea,

When they had smoked a while, down from  
the shelf

He'd reached his own small-pipes ; and  
speedily

They two were at it, playing, tune for tune,  
Against each other all the winter's night,  
And all next morning till the stroke of noon,  
Piping out bravely all their hearts' delight.

He still could see Jack sitting there, so lean,  
Long-backed, broad-shouldered, stooping and  
white-faced,  
With cropped black head, and black eyes  
burning keen ;

Tight-lipped, yet smiling gravely ; round his  
waist  
His small-pipes strapped, the bellows 'neath  
his arm,  
His nimble fingers lively at the reeds—  
His body swaying to the lilting charm  
Of his own magic piping, till great beads  
Of sweat were glistening on his low, white  
brow.

And he himself, a herd-lad, yellow-haired,  
With wide eyes even bluer then than now,  
Who sat bolt-upright in his chair and stared  
Before him at the steady glowing peat,  
As though each note he played he caught in  
flight  
From the loud wind, and in the quivering heat  
Could see it dancing to its own delight.

All night the rafters hummed with piping  
airs,  
And candle after candle guttered out ;  
But not a footstep climbed the creaky stairs  
To the dark bedrooms. Turn and turn  
about  
They piped or listened, while the wind  
without  
Roared round the steading, battering at the  
door  
As though to burst it wide ; then with a shout  
Swept on across the pitchy leagues of moor :

Pitman and shepherd piping turn for turn  
The airs they loved, till to the melody  
Their pulses beat ; and their rapt eyes would  
burn,  
Thrilled with the sight that each most loved  
to see—

The pitman, gazing down a gallery  
Of glittering black coal, an endless seam ;  
And through his piping stole the mystery  
Of subterranean waters, and of dream  
Corridors dwindling everlastingly.

The shepherd, from the top of Windy Gile  
Looking o'er range on range of glowing hills,  
A world beneath him, stretching, mile on  
mile,  
Brown bent and heather, laced by flashing  
rills—

His body flooded with the light that fills  
The veins with running gold. And April  
light  
And wind, and all the melody that spills  
From tumbling waters, thrilled his pipes that  
night.

Ay, thon was playing, thon ! And nevermore  
The world would hear such piping. Jack  
was dead,  
And he, so old and broken.

By the door  
All day he sat remembering ; and in bed

He lay beside his sleeping wife all night,  
Too spent, too weary, even to toss and turn.  
Dawn found him lying, strangely cold and  
    white,  
As though still listening to the Otterburn.



## THE NEWS

THE buzzer boomed, and instantly the clang  
Of hammers dropt, just as the fendered bow  
Bumped with soft splash against the wharf,  
—though now  
Again within the Yard a hammer rang—  
A solitary hammer striking steel  
Somewhere aloft—and strangely, stridently  
Echoed as though it struck the steely sky,  
The low, cold, steely sky.

She seemed to feel  
That hammer in her heart—blow after blow  
In a strange, clanging hollow seemed to strike  
Monotonous, unrelenting, cruel-like—  
Her heart that such a little while ago  
Had been so full, so happy with its news  
Scarce uttered even to itself.

It stopt,  
That dreadful hammer. And the silence dropt  
Again a moment. Then a clatter of shoes  
And murmur of voices as the men trooped  
out ;  
And as each wife with basket and hot can  
Hurried towards the gate to meet her man,



Was whether he would like the food she'd brought—

Whose one desire, to watch her husband eating.

With a grave smile he took his bait from her,

And then without a word they moved away  
To where some grimy baulks of timber lay  
Beside the river, and 'twas quieter  
Than in the crowd of munching, squatting  
men

And chattering wives and children. As he ate,

With absent eyes upon the river set,  
She chattered too a little now and then  
Of household happenings ; and then silently  
They sat and watched the grimy-flowing stream,  
Dazed by the stunning din of hissing steam  
Escaping from an anchored boat hard by,  
Each busy with their own thoughts, who till  
now

Had shared each thought, each feeling, speaking out

Easily, eagerly, without a doubt,  
As happy, innocent children, anyhow,  
The innermost secrets of their wedded life.  
So as the dinner-hour went quickly by  
They sat there for the first time, troubled,  
shy—

A silent husband and a silent wife.

But she was only troubled by excess  
Of happiness ; and as she watched the stream,  
She looked upon her life as in a dream,  
Recalling all its tale of happiness  
Unbroken and unshadowed since she'd met  
Her man the first time, eighteen months  
ago. . . .

A keen blue day with sudden flaws of snow  
And sudden sunshine, when she first had set  
Her wondering eyes upon him—gaily clad  
For football in a jersey green and red,  
Knees bare beneath white shorts, his curly head  
Wind-blown and wet—and knew him for her  
lad.

He strode towards her down the windy  
street—

The wet grey pavements flashing sudden gold,  
And gold the unending coils of smoke that  
rolled

Unceasingly overhead, fired by a fleet,  
Wild glint of glancing sunlight. On he came  
Beside her brother—still a raw, uncouth  
Young hobbledehoy—a strapping, mettled  
youth

In the first pride of manhood, that wild flame  
Touching his hair to fire, his cheeks aglow  
With the sharp stinging wind, his arms aswing ;  
And as she watched, she felt the tingling sting  
Of flying flakes, and in a whirl of snow  
A moment he was hidden from her sight.

It passed, and then before she was aware,  
With white flakes powdering his ruddy hair  
He stood before her, laughing in the light,  
In all his bravery of red and green  
Snow-sprinkled; and she laughed too. In  
the sun  
They laughed: and in that laughter they  
were one.

Now as with kindled eyes on the unseen  
Grey river she sat gazing, she again  
Lived through that moment in a golden  
dream . . .

And then quite suddenly she saw the stream  
Distinct in its cold, grimy flowing—then  
The present with its deeper happiness  
Thrilled her afresh—this wonder strange and  
new—

This dream in her young body coming true,  
Incredible, yet certain none-the-less—  
This news, scarce broken to herself, that she  
Must break to him. She longed to see his  
eyes

Kindle to hear it, happy with surprise  
When she should break it to him presently.

But she must wait a while yet. Still too  
strange,  
Too wonderful for words, she could not share  
Even with him her secret. He sat there  
So quietly, little dreaming of the change

That had come over her—but when he knew !  
For he was always one for bairns, was John,  
And this would be his own, their own.

There shone

A strange new light on all since this was  
true,

All, all seemed strange, the river and the  
shore,

The barges and the wharves with timber  
piled,

And all her world familiar from a child,

Was as a world she'd never seen before.

And he, too, sat with eyes upon the stream  
Remembering that day when first the light  
Of her young eyes with laughter sparkling  
bright

Kindled to his ; and as he caught the gleam  
The life within him quickened suddenly  
To fire, and in a world of golden laughter  
They stood alone together ; and then after,  
When he was playing with his mates and he  
Hurtled headlong towards the goal, he knew  
Her eyes were on him ; and for her alone,  
Who had the merriest eyes he'd ever known,  
He played that afternoon. Though until  
then

He'd only played to please himself, somehow  
She seemed to have a hold upon him, now,  
No longer a boy, a man among grown men,  
He'd never have a thought apart from her,

From her, his mate . . .

And then that golden night  
When, in a whirl of melody and light,  
Her merry brown eyes flashing merrier,  
They rode together in a gilded car  
That seemed to roll for ever round and round  
In a blind blaze of light and blare of sound,  
For ever and for ever, till afar  
It seemed to bear them from the surging  
throng

Of lads and lasses happy in release  
From the week's work in yards and factories—  
For ever through a land of light and song  
While they sat, rapt in silence, hand in hand,  
And looked into each other's merry eyes,  
They two, together, whirled through Paradise,  
A golden, glittering, unearthly land,  
A land where light and melody were one,  
And melody and light, a golden fire  
That ran through their young bodies, and  
desire,  
A golden music streaming from the sun,  
Filling their veins with golden melody  
And singing fire . . .

And then when quiet fell,  
And they together, with so much to tell,  
So much to tell each other instantly,  
Left the hot throng and roar and glare behind  
Seeking the darker streets, and stood at last  
In a dark lane where footsteps seldom passed,  
Lit by a far lamp and one glowing blind

That seemed to make the darkness yet more  
dark

Between the cliffs of houses, black and high,  
That soared above them to the starry sky,  
A deep blue sky where spark on fiery spark  
The stars for them were kindled, as they  
raised

Their eyes in new-born wonder to the night ;  
And in a solitude of cold starlight  
They stood alone together, hushed, and gazed  
Into each other's eyes until speech came ;  
And underneath the stars they talked and  
talked . . .

Then he remembered how they two had  
walked

Along a beach that was one golden flame  
Of yellow sand beside a flame-blue sea  
The day they wedded, that strange day of  
dream,  
One flame of blue and gold . . .

The murky stream  
Flowed once again before his eyes, and he  
Dropt back into the present ; and he knew  
That he must break the news that suddenly  
Had come to him last night as drowsily  
He lay beside her—startling, stern and true  
Out of the darkness flashing. He must tell  
How, as he lay beside her in the night,  
His heart had told him he must go and fight,  
Must throw up everything he loved so well



To go and fight in lands across the sea  
Beside the other lads—must throw up all,  
His work, his home. . . .

The shadow of the wall  
Fell on her once again, and stridently  
That hammer struck her heart, as from the  
stream

She raised her eyes to his, and saw their  
flame—

Then back into her heart her glad news came  
As John smiled on her ; and her golden  
dream

Once more was all about her as she thought  
Of home, the new home that the future held  
For them—they three together. Fear was  
quelled

By this new happiness that all unsought  
Had sprung from the old happiness. . . .

And he,  
Watching her, thought of home too. When  
he slept

With her across the threshold first, and slept  
That first night in her arms so quietly,  
For the first time in all his life he'd known  
All that home meant, or nearly all—for yet  
Each night brought him new knowledge as  
she met

Him, smiling on the clean, white, threshold  
stone,

When he returned from labour in the  
Yard. . . .

And she'd be waiting for him soon, while he  
Was fighting with his fellows oversea—  
She would be waiting for him . . .

It was hard

For him that he must go, as go he must,  
But harder far for her : things always fell  
Harder upon the women. It was well  
She didn't dream yet. . . . He could only  
trust

She, too, would feel that he had got to go,  
Then 'twould not be so hard to go, and  
yet . . .

Dreaming, he saw the lamplit table, set  
With silver pot and cups and plates aglow  
For tea in their own kitchen bright and snug,  
With her behind the teapot—saw it all,  
The coloured calendars upon the wall,  
The bright fire-irons, and the gay hearthrug  
She'd made herself from gaudy rags ; his  
place

Awaiting him, with something hot-and-hot—  
His favourite sausages as like as not,  
Between two plates for him—as, with clean  
face

Glowing from washing in the scullery,  
And such a hunger on him, he would sink  
Content into his chair . . .

'Twas strange to think

All this was over, and so suddenly—

'Twas strange, and hard . . .

Still gazing on the stream,

Her thoughts, too, were at home. She heard  
the patter  
Of tiny feet beside her, and the chatter  
Of little tongues . . .

Then loudly through their dream  
The buzzer boomed ; and all about them  
rose

The men and women : soon the wives were on  
The ferry-boat, now puffing to be gone ;  
The husbands hurrying, ere the gates should  
close,  
Back to the Yard. . . .

She, in her dream of gold,  
And he, in his new desolation, stood.  
Then soberly, as wife and husband should,  
They parted with their news as yet untold.

## DAFFODILS

HE liked the daffodils. He liked to see  
Them nodding in the hedgerows cheerily  
Along the dusty lanes as he went by—  
Nodding and laughing to a fellow—ay,  
Nodding and laughing till you'd almost  
think

They, too, enjoyed the jest.

Without a wink  
That solemn butler said it, calm and smug,  
Deep-voiced as though he talked into a jug :  
“ His lordship says he won't require no more  
Crocks riveted or mended till the war  
Is over.”

Lord ! He'd asked to have a wire  
The moment that his lordship should desire  
To celebrate the occasion fittingly  
By a wild burst of mending crockery  
Like a true Englishman, and hang expense !  
He'd had to ask it, though he'd too much  
sense

To lift a lash or breathe a word before  
His lordship's lordship closed the heavy door.

And then he'd laughed. Lord ! but it did  
 him good,  
 That quiet laugh. And somewhere in the  
 wood,  
 Behind the Hall there, a woodpecker laughed  
 Right out aloud as though he'd gone clean  
 daft—

Right out aloud he laughed, the brazen bird,  
 As if he didn't care a straw who heard—  
 But then he'd not his daily bread to earn  
 By mending crocks.

And now at every turn  
 The daffodils were laughing quietly,  
 Nodding and laughing to themselves, as he  
 Chuckled : Now there's a patriot, real true-  
 blue !

It seemed the daffodils enjoyed it too—  
 The fun of it. He wished that he could  
 see—

Old solemn-mug—they laughing quietly  
 At him. But, then, he'd never have a dim  
 Idea they laughed, and, least of all, at him.  
 He'd never dream they could be laughing at  
 A butler.

'Twould be good to see the fat  
 Old peach-cheek in his solemn black and  
 starch

Parading in his pompous parlour-march  
 Across that field of laughing daffodils.  
 'Twould be a sight to make you skip up hills,

Ay, crutch and all, and never feel your pack,  
To see a butler in his starch and black  
Among the daffodils, ridiculous  
As that old bubbly-jock with strut and fuss—  
Though that was rather rough upon the bird !  
For all his pride he didn't look absurd  
Among the flowers—nor even that black sow  
Grunting and grubbing in among them now.

And he was glad he hadn't got a trade  
That starched the mother-wit in you, and  
    made  
A man look silly in a field of flowers.  
'Twas better mending crocks, although for  
    hours  
You hobbled on—ay ! and maybe for days—  
Hungry and cold along the muddy ways  
Without a job. And even when the sun  
Was shining, 'twas not altogether fun  
To lose the chance of earning a few pence  
In these days : though 'twas well he'd got  
    the sense  
To see the funny side of things. It cost  
You nothing, laughing to yourself. You lost  
Far more by going fiddle-faced through life  
Looking for trouble.

He would tell his wife  
When he got home. But lord, she'd never see  
What tickled him so mightily, not she !  
She'd only look up puzzled-like, and say  
She didn't wonder at his lordship. Nay,

With tripe and trotters at the price they were,  
You'd got to count your coppers and take  
care

Of every farthing.

Jack would see the fun—  
Ay, Jack would see the joke. Jack was his  
son—

The youngest of the lot. And, man-alive,  
'Twas queer that only one of all the five  
Had got a twinkle in him—all the rest  
Dull as ditchwater to the merriest jest.  
Good lads enough they were, their mother's  
sons ;

And they'd all pluck enough to face the guns  
Out at the front. They'd got their mother's  
pluck :

And he was proud of them, and wished them  
luck.

That was no laughing matter—though 'twas  
well

Maybe if you could crack a joke in hell  
And shame the devil. Jack at least would  
fight

As well as any though his heart was light.  
Jack was the boy for fighting and for fun ;  
And he was glad to think he'd got a son  
Who, even facing bloody death, would see  
That little joke about the crockery,  
And chuckle as he charged.

His thoughts dropped back

Through eighteen years ; and he again saw  
    Jack

At the old home beneath the Malvern hills,  
A little fellow plucking daffodils,  
A little fellow who could scarcely walk,  
Yet chuckling as he snapped each juicy stalk  
And held up every yellow bloom to smell,  
Poking his tiny nose into the bell  
And sniffing its fresh scent, and chuckling still  
As though he'd secrets with each daffodil.  
Ay, he could see again the little fellow  
In his blue frock among that laughing yellow,  
And plovers in their sheeny black and white  
Flirting and tumbling in the morning light  
About his curly head. He still could see,  
Shutting his eyes, as plain as plain could be,  
Drift upon drift, those long-dead daffodils  
Against the far green of the Malvern hills,  
Nodding and laughing round his little lad,  
As if to see him happy made them glad—  
Nodding and laughing. . . .

They were nodding now,  
The daffodils, and laughing—yet, somehow,  
They didn't seem so merry now. . . .

And he  
Was fighting in a bloody trench maybe  
For very life this minute. . . .

They missed Jack,  
And he would give them all to have him back.



## BETWEEN THE LINES

WHEN consciousness came back, he found he  
lay  
Between the opposing fires, but could not tell  
On which hand were his friends ; and either  
way  
For him to turn was chancy—bullet and  
shell  
Whistling and shrieking over him, as the  
glare  
Of searchlights scoured the darkness to blind  
day.  
He scrambled to his hands and knees ascare,  
Dragging his wounded foot through puddled  
clay,  
And tumbled in a hole a shell had scooped  
At random in a turnip-field between  
The unseen trenches where the foes lay  
cooped  
Through that unending battle of unseen,  
Dead-locked, league-stretching armies ; and  
quite spent  
He rolled upon his back within the pit,

And lay secure, thinking of all it meant—  
His lying in that little hole, sore hit,  
But living, while across the starry sky  
Shrapnel and shell went screeching overhead—  
Of all it meant that he, Tom Dodd, should  
lie

Among the Belgian turnips, while his bed . . .

If it were he, indeed, who'd climbed each  
night,  
Fagged with the day's work, up the narrow  
stair,  
And slipped his clothes off in the candle-light,  
Too tired to fold them neatly on a chair  
The way his mother'd taught him—too dog-  
tired  
After the long day's serving in the shop,  
Inquiring what each customer required,  
Politely talking weather, fit to drop. . . .

And now for fourteen days and nights at  
least  
He hadn't had his clothes off; and had lain  
In muddy trenches, napping like a beast  
With one eye open, under sun and rain  
And that unceasing hell-fire. . . .

It was strange  
How things turned out—the chances! You'd  
just got  
To take your luck in life, you couldn't  
change

Your luck.

And so here he was lying shot  
Who just six months ago had thought to  
    spend  
His days behind a counter. Still, perhaps . . .  
And now, God only knew how he would end !

He'd like to know how many of the chaps  
Had won back to the trench alive, when he  
Had fallen wounded and been left for dead,  
If any ! . . .

    This was different, certainly,  
From selling knots of tape and reels of thread  
And knots of tape and reels of thread and  
    knots

Of tape and reels of thread and knots of tape,  
Day in, day out, and answering "Have you  
    got's ?"

And "Do you keep's ?" till there seemed no  
    escape

From everlasting serving in a shop,  
Inquiring what each customer required,  
Politely talking weather, fit to drop,  
With swollen ankles, tired. . . .

    But he was tired  
Now. Every bone was aching, and had  
    ached

For fourteen days and nights in that wet  
    trench—

Just duller when he slept than when he  
    waked—

Crouching for shelter from the steady drench  
Of shell and shrapnel. . . .

That old trench, it seemed  
Almost like home to him. He'd slept and fed  
And sung and smoked in it, while shrapnel  
screamed

And shells went whining harmless overhead—  
Harmless, at least, as far as he . . .

But Dick—

Dick hadn't found them harmless yesterday  
At breakfast, when he'd said he couldn't  
stick

Eating dry bread, and crawled out the back  
way,

And brought them butter in a lordly dish—  
Butter enough for all, and held it high,  
Yellow and fresh and clean as you could  
wish—

When plump upon the plate from out the  
sky

A shell fell bursting. . . . Where the butter  
went

God only knew! . . .

And Dick . . . He dared not think  
Of what had come to Dick . . . or what it  
meant—

The shrieking and the whistling and the stink  
He'd lived in fourteen days and nights.

'Twas luck

That he still lived . . . And queer how  
little then

He seemed to care that Dick . . . Perhaps  
    'twas pluck  
That hardened him—a man among the men—  
Perhaps . . . Yet, only think things out a bit,  
And he was rabbit-livered, blue with funk !  
And he'd liked Dick . . . and yet when  
    Dick was hit  
He hadn't turned a hair. The meanest  
    skunk  
He should have thought would feel it when  
    his mate  
Was blown to smithereens—Dick, proud as  
    punch,  
Grinning like sin, and holding up the plate—  
But he had gone on munching his dry hunch,  
Unwinking, till he swallowed the last crumb.

Perhaps 'twas just because he dared not let  
His mind run upon Dick, who'd been his  
    chum—  
He dared not now, though he could not  
    forget.

Dick took his luck. And, life or death,  
    'twas luck  
From first to last ; and you'd just got to  
    trust  
Your luck and grin. It wasn't so much  
    pluck  
As knowing that you'd got to, when needs  
    must,

And better to die grinning. . . .

Quiet now  
Had fallen on the night. On either hand  
The guns were quiet. Cool upon his brow  
The quiet darkness brooded, as he scanned  
The starry sky. He'd never seen before  
So many stars. Although, of course, he'd  
known

That there were stars, somehow before the war  
He'd never realised them—so thick-sown,  
Millions and millions. Serving in the shop,  
Stars didn't count for much; and then at  
nights

Strolling the pavement, dull and fit to drop,  
You didn't see much but the city lights.  
He'd never in his life seen so much sky  
As he'd seen this last fortnight. It was queer  
The things war taught you. He'd a mind  
to try

To count the stars—they shone so bright and  
clear.

One, two, three, four . . . Ah, God, but he  
was tired . . .

Five, six, seven, eight . . .

Yes : it was number eight.  
And what was the next thing that she re-  
quired ?

(Too bad of customers to come so late,  
At closing-time !) Again within the shop  
He handled knots of tape and reels of thread,  
Politely talking weather, fit to drop. . . .

When once again the whole sky overhead  
Flared blind with searchlights, and the shriek  
of shell

And scream of shrapnel roused him. Drowsily  
He stared about him wondering. Then he fell  
Into deep, dreamless slumber.

He could see  
Two dark eyes peeping at him ere he knew  
He was awake, and it again was day—  
An August morning burning to clear blue.  
The frightened rabbit scuttled. . . .

Far away  
A sound of firing. . . . Up there, in the sky,  
Big dragon-flies hung hovering . . . snow-  
balls burst  
About them. . . .

Flies and snowballs ! With a cry  
He crouched to watch the airmen pass—the  
first

That he'd seen under fire. Lord, that was pluck—

Shells bursting all about them—and what nerve!

They took their chance, and trusted to their luck—

At such a dizzy height to dip and swerve,  
Dodging the shell-fire. . . .

Hell ! but one was hit,  
And tumbling like a pigeon plump. . . .

Thank Heaven

It righted, and then turned ; and after it  
The whole flock followed safe—four, five,  
six, seven—

Yes, they were all there safe. He hoped  
they'd win

Back to their lines in safety. They deserved,  
Even if they were Germans . . . 'Twas no  
sin

To wish them luck. Think how that beggar  
swerved

Just in the nick of time !

He, too, must try  
To win back to the lines, though, likely as  
not,

He'd take the wrong turn : but he couldn't lie  
For ever in that hungry hole and rot.

He'd got to take his luck, to take his chance  
Of being sniped by foes or friends. He'd be  
With any luck in Germany or France  
Or kingdom-come next morning. . . .

Drearily  
The blazing day burnt over him. Shot and  
shell

Whistling and whining ceaselessly. But light  
Faded at last, and as the darkness fell  
He rose and crawled away into the night.



## STRAWBERRIES

SINCE four she had been plucking strawberries ;  
And it was only eight now, and the sun  
Already blazing. There'd be little ease  
For her until the endless day was done. . . .

Yet, why should she have any ease, while he—  
While he . . .

But there, she mustn't think of him,  
Fighting beneath that burning sun, maybe—  
His rifle nigh red-hot, and every limb  
Aching for sleep, the sweat dried on his brow,  
And baking in the blaze, and such a thirst,  
Prickly and choking, she could feel it now  
In her own throat. He'd said it was the  
worst,  
In his last letter, worst of all to bear,  
That burning thirst—that, and the hellish  
noise. . . .

And she was plucking strawberries ; and there  
In the cool shadow of the elm their boys,  
Their baby-boys, were sleeping quietly. . . .

But she was aching too : her head and back  
 Were one hot blinding ache ; and dizzily  
 Sometimes across her eyes the light swam  
                   black

With dancing spots of red . . .

  So ripe and sweet  
 Among their fresh green leaves the straw-  
                   berries lay,

Although the earth was baking in the heat,  
 Burning her soles—and yet the summer day  
 Was young enough !

                  If she could only cram  
 A handful of fresh berries sweet and cool  
 Into his mouth, while he . . .

  A red light swam  
 Before her eyes . . .

                  She mustn't think, poor fool,  
 What he'd be doing now, or she'd go  
                   crazed . . .

Then what would happen to them left alone—  
 The little lads !

                  And he would be fair 'mazed,  
 When he came back, to see how they had  
                   grown,

William and Dick, and how they talked.  
                   Two year

Since he had gone—and he had never set  
 His eyes upon his youngest son. 'Twas  
                   queer

To think he hadn't seen his baby yet—  
 And it nigh fourteen months old.

Everything  
Was queer in these days. She could never  
guess  
How it had come about that he could bring  
Himself to go and fight. 'Twas little less  
Than murder to have taken him, and he  
So mild and easy-tempered, never one  
For drink or picking quarrels hastily . . .

And now he would be fighting in that  
sun . . .  
'Twas quite beyond her. Yet, somehow, it  
seemed  
He'd got to go. She couldn't under-  
stand . . .  
When they had married, little had they  
dreamed  
What things were coming to ! In all the land  
There was no gentler husband . . .

It was queer :  
She couldn't get the rights of it, no way.  
She thought and thought, but couldn't get it  
clear  
Why he'd to leave his own work—making  
hay  
'Twould be this weather—leave his home, and  
all,  
His wife and his young family, and go  
To fight in foreign lands, and maybe fall,  
Fighting another lad he didn't know,  
And had no quarrel with. . . .

The world was mad,  
Or she was going crazy. Anyhow  
She couldn't see the rights of it . . . Her lad  
Had thought it right to go, she knew . . .  
But now  
She mustn't think about it all. . . . And so  
She'd best stop puzzling, and pluck straw-  
berries. . . .

And every woman plucking in the row  
Had husband, son, or brother overseas.

Men seemed to see things differently : and  
still  
She wondered sore if even they knew why  
They went themselves, almost against their  
will. . . .

But sure enough, that was her baby's cry.  
'Twas feeding-time ; and she'd be glad to  
rest  
Her back a bit. It always gave her ease,  
To feel her baby feeding at her breast,  
And pluck to go on gathering strawberries.

## THE BLAST-FURNACE

AND such a night ! But maybe in that mood  
'Twas for the best ; for he was like to  
brood—

And he could hardly brood on such a night  
With that squall blowing, on this dizzy  
height

Where he caught every breath of it—the  
snow

Stinging his cheek, and melting in the glow  
Above the furnace, big white flakes that fell  
Sizzling upon the red-hot furnace-bell ;  
And the sea roaring, down there in the dark,  
So loud to-night he needn't stop to hark—  
Four hundred feet below where now he stood.  
A lively place to earn a livelihood—

His livelihood, his mother's, and the three  
Young sisters', quite a little family  
Depending on him now—on him, Jim Burn,  
Just nineteen past—to work for them, and  
earn

Money enough to buy them daily bread  
Already . . .

And his father on the bed  
At home . . . gey sudden . . .

Nay, he mustn't think,  
But shove his trolley to the furnace brink,  
And tip his load upon the glowing bell,  
Then back again towards the hoist. 'Twas  
well

He'd work to stop him thinking. He was  
glad

His mate to-night was not a talky lad,  
But Peter, mum-glum Peter, who would  
stare

With such queer sulky looks upon the flare  
When round the dipping bell it shot up  
high

With roar and flourish into that black sky.  
He liked to hear it roaring, liked to see  
The great flame leaping skyward suddenly,  
Then sinking slowly, as the bell rose up  
And covered it again with red-hot cup,  
When it would feed more quiet for a time  
Upon the meal of ironstone and lime  
He'd fetched it in his trolley . . .

Ay, and he,  
Trundling his truck along that gallery  
High in the air all night to keep it fed—  
And all the while his father lying dead  
At home—to earn a livelihood. 'Twas  
strange

To think what it all meant to him—the  
change . . .

And strange he'd never thought before how  
queer

It was for him, earning his bread up here  
On this blast-furnace, perched on the cliff-  
top—

Four hundred feet or so, a dizzy drop,  
And he'd be feeding fishes in the sea !  
How loud it roared to-night, and angrily—  
He liked to hear it breaking on the shore,  
And the wind's threshing, and the furnace'  
roar ;

And then the sudden quiet, a dead lull,  
When you could only hear a frightened gull  
Screeching down in the darkness there below,  
Or a dog's yelp from the valley, or the  
snow

Sizzling upon hot iron. Queer, indeed,  
To think that he had never taken heed  
Before to-night, or thought about it all.

He'd been a boy till this, and had no call  
To turn his mind to thinking seriously ;  
But he'd grown up since yesterday, and he  
Must think a man's thoughts now—since  
yesterday,

When he'd not had a thought but who should  
play

Full-back for Cleveland Rovers, now that  
Jack

Had gone to Montreal ; or should he back  
Old Girl or Cleopatra for the Cup.

In four-and-twenty hours he had grown  
up . . .

His father, sinking back there on the bed,  
With glassy eyes and helpless, lolling head . . .  
The dropping jaw . . . the breath that didn't  
come,

Though still he listened for it, frozen  
numb. . . .

And then, his mother . . . but he must not  
let

His mind run on his mother now. And yet  
He'd often thought his father glum and grim.  
He understood now. It was not for him,  
His son, to breathe a word to her, when he,  
Her husband, had borne with her patiently  
Through all those years. Ay, now he under-  
stood

Much, since he hadn't his own livelihood  
To think of only, but five mouths to feed—  
And the oldest, the most helpless . . . He  
had need

To understand a little . . .

But to-night  
He mustn't brood. . . . And what a golden  
light

The steady spurt of molten slag below  
Threw up upon the snow-clouds—and the  
snow

Drifting down through it in great flakes of  
gold,



Melting to steam, or driven, white and cold,  
Into the darkness on a sudden gust.  
And how the cold wind caught him, as he  
thrust

His empty trolley back towards the hoist,  
Straight from the sea, making his dry lips  
moist

With salty breath.

'Twas strange to-night how he  
Was noticing, and seeing suddenly  
Things for the first time he'd not seen before,  
Though he'd been on this shift at least a score  
Of times. But things were different somehow.

Strange  
To think his father's death had wrought the  
change  
And made him see things different—little  
things :

The sudden flashing of a sea-gull's wings  
Out of the dark, bewildered by the glare ;  
And, when the flame leapt, mum-glum Peter's  
hair

Kindling a fierier red ; the wind ; the snow ;  
The unseen washing of the waves below  
About the cliff-foot. He could almost see,  
In fancy, breakers frothing furiously  
Against the crumbling cliffs—the frantic spray  
Leaping into the darkness, nigh half way  
Up the sheer height.

And now his thoughts dropt back  
Into the valley, lying still and black

Behind him—and the mine where other men  
 Were toiling on their nightshift, even then  
 Working the ironstone for daily bread,  
 Their livelihood. . . .

He saw the little red  
 Raw row of square brick houses, dark they'd be  
 And quiet now. Yet plainly he could see  
 The street he lived in—ay, and Number Eight,  
 His father's house : the rusty iron gate ;  
 The unkempt garden, and the blistered door ;  
 The unwashed doorstep he'd not seen before,  
 Or, leastways, hadn't noticed ; and the bell  
 That never rang, though he remembered well  
 His father 'd tinkered it times out of mind ;  
 And in each window a drawn yellow blind,  
 Broken and grimy—and that blind to-day  
 Drawn down for the first time. . . .

His father lay  
 In the front bedroom, quiet on the bed . . .  
 And he, upon his usual shift . . .

She'd said,  
 His mother 'd said, he shouldn't take his shift  
 Before the undertaker 'd been to lift . . .  
 'Twas scarcely decent : that was what she  
 said—

Him working, and his father lying dead,  
 And hardly cold. . . .

And she, to talk to him,  
 His son, of decency, there, with that grim  
 Half-smile still on her husband's cold white  
 face !

He couldn't bide a moment in the place  
Listening to her chat-chatter, knowing all  
That he knew now. . . . But there, he had  
no call  
To blame her, when his father'd never blamed.  
He wondered in that room she wasn't  
shamed. . . .

She didn't understand. He understood,  
Now he'd grown up, and had his livelihood,  
And theirs, to earn. . . .

Lord, but that was a rare  
Fine flourish the flame made, a bonny flare  
Leaping up to the stars. The snow had stopt—  
He hadn't heeded—and the wind had dropt  
Suddenly ; and the stars were shining clear.  
Over the furnace' roaring he could hear  
The waves wash-washing ; and could see the  
foam

Lifting and falling down there in the gloam . . .  
White as his father's face. . . .

He'd never heard  
His father murmur once—nay, not a word  
He'd muttered : he was never one to blame.  
And men had got to take things as they came.

## IN THE MEADOW

THE smell of wet hay in the heat  
All morning steaming round him rose,  
As, in a kind of nodding doze,  
Perched on the hard and jolting seat,  
He drove the rattling, jangling rake  
Round and around the Five Oaks Mead.  
With that old mare he scarcely need  
To drive at all, or keep awake.  
Gazing with half-shut, sleepy eyes  
At her white flanks and grizzled tail  
That flicked and flicked, without avail,  
To drive away the cloud of flies  
That hovered, closing and unclosing,  
A shimmering hum and humming shimmer,  
Dwindling dim and ever dimmer  
In his dazzled sight, till, dozing,  
He seemed to hear a murmuring stream  
And gaze into a rippling pool  
Beneath thick branches dark and cool—  
And gazing, gazing till a gleam  
Within the darkness caught his eyes,  
He saw there smiling up at him

A young girl's face, now rippling dim,  
Now flashing clear . . .

Without surprise  
He marked the eyes translucent blue,  
The full red lips, that seemed to speak,  
The curves of rounded chin and cheek,  
The low, broad brow, sun-tanned . . .

He knew  
That face, yet could not call to mind  
Where he had seen it, and in vain  
Strove to recall . . . when sudden rain  
Crashed down and made the clear pool blind,  
And it was lost . . .

And, with a jerk  
That well-nigh shook him from his seat,  
He wakened to the steamy heat  
And clank and rattle.

Still at work  
The stolid mare kept on ; and still  
Over her hot white flanks the flies  
Hung humming ; and his dazzled eyes  
Closed gradually again, until  
He dozed . . .

And stood within the door  
Of Dinchill dairy, drinking there  
Thirst-quenching draughts of stone-cold air—  
The scoured white shelves and sanded floor  
And shallow milk-pans creamy-white  
Gleamed coldly in the dusky light . . .  
And then he saw her, stooping down  
Over a milk-pan, while her eyes

Looked up at him without surprise  
Over the shoulder of her gown—  
Her fresh print gown of speedwell blue . . .  
The eyes that looked out of the cool  
Untroubled crystal of the pool  
Looked into his again.

He knew

Those eyes now . . .

From his dreamy doze

A sudden jolting of the rake  
Aroused him.

Startled broad awake

He sat upright, lost in amaze  
That he should dream of her—that lass!—  
And see her face within the pool!

He'd known her always. Why, at school  
They'd sat together in the class.  
He'd always liked her well enough,  
Young Polly Dale—and they had played  
At Prisoners' Base and Who's Afraid,  
At Tiggy and at Blind Man's Buff,  
A hundred times together . . .

Ay,

He'd always known her . . . It was strange,  
Though he had noticed that a change  
Had come upon her—she was shy,  
And quieter, since she left school  
And put her hair up—he'd not seen  
Her face till from the glancing sheen  
It looked up at him from the pool . . .



## PARTNERS

HE'D got to see it through. Ay, that was  
plain—

Plain as the damning figures on that page  
Which burnt and bit themselves into his brain  
Since he'd first lighted on them—such an age  
Since he'd first lighted on them ! though the  
clock

Had only ticked one hour out—its white face  
And black hands counting time alone. . . .

The shock  
Had dropped him out of time and out of  
space

Into the dead void of eternity,  
Lightless and aching, where his soul hung  
dead

With wide-set staring eyes that still could see  
Those damning figures, burning hugely red  
On the low aching dome of the black heaven  
That crushed upon his temples — glaring  
bright—

10,711—  
Searing his eyeballs. . . .



Yet his living sight  
Was fixed on the white ledger, while he sat  
Before his office-table in his chair—  
The chair he'd taken when he'd hung his hat  
Within the cupboard door, and brushed his  
hair,  
And stood a moment, humming "Chevy  
Chase,"

His hands beneath his coat-tails, by the grate,  
Warming his back, and thinking of a case  
They'd won outright with costs, and . . .

Phil was late :  
But Phil was Phil. At home they used to  
call

His brother "Better-late." At every turn  
He'd had to wait for Phil. And after all  
There wasn't so much doing, now that  
concern . . .

And little thinking anything was wrong,  
Laying his hand upon his own armchair  
To draw it out, still humming the old song,  
He'd seen the note from Philip lying there  
Upon the open ledger.

Once he read  
The truth, unrealising, and again,  
But only two words echoed through his head,  
And buzzed uncomprehended in his brain—  
"Embezzled" and "absconded."

Phil had spelt  
His shame out boldly in his boyish hand.

And then those figures . . .

Dizzily he felt  
The truth burn through him. He could  
hardly stand,  
But sank into his chair with eyes set wide  
Upon those damning figures, murmuring  
“Phil!”

And listening to the whirr of wheels outside,  
And sparrows cheeping on the window-sill—  
Still murmuring “Phil! Poor Phil!”

But Phil was gone :  
And he was left alone to bear the brunt. . . .

“Phil! Little Phil!”

And still the morning shone  
Bright at the window . . .

Callous, curt, and blunt,  
The world would call his brother . . . not  
that name!

And yet names mattered little at this pass.  
He'd known that Phil was slack . . . but  
this!

The blame  
Was his as much as Phil's. As in a glass  
Darkly he saw he'd been to blame as well :  
And he would bear the blame. Had he not  
known  
That Phil was slack? For all that he could  
tell,

If he'd looked after Phil, this might . . .

Alone

He'd got to face the music. He was glad  
He was alone . . . And yet, for Phil's own  
sake,

If he had only had the pluck, poor lad,  
To see the thing through like a man, and take  
His punishment !

For him was no escape,  
Either by Phil's road or that darker road.  
He knew the cost, and how the thing would  
shape—

Too well he knew the full weight of the load  
He strapped upon his shoulders. It was just  
That he should bear the burden on his back.  
He'd trusted Phil ; and he'd no right to trust  
Even his brother, knowing he was slack,  
When other people's money was at stake.  
He'd, too, been slack ; and slackness was a  
crime—

The deadliest crime of all . . .

And broad awake,  
As in a nightmare, he was "doing time"  
Already . . .

Yet, he'd only trusted Phil—  
His brother, Phil—and it had come to this !

Always before whenever things went ill  
His brother 'd turned to him for help ; and his  
Had always been the hand stretched out to  
him.

Now Phil had fled even him. If he'd but  
known !

Brooding he saw with tender eyes grown dim  
 Phil running down that endless road alone—  
 Phil running from himself down that dark  
 road—

The road which leads nowhither, which is  
 hell ;

And yearning towards him, bowed beneath his  
 load,

And murmuring " Little Phil ! " . . .

Again he fell

Into the dead void of eternity,  
 Lightless and aching, where his soul hung  
 dead

With wide-set staring eyes that still could see  
 Those damning figures, burning hugely red  
 On the low aching dome of the black heaven  
 That crushed upon his temples — glaring  
 bright—

10,711—

Searing his eyeballs . . .

When a ripple of light

Dappled his desk . . .

And they were boys together,  
 Rambling the hills of home that April day,  
 Stumbling and plunging knee-deep through  
 the heather

Towards Hallypike, the little lough that lay  
 Glancing and gleaming in the sun, to search  
 For eggs of inland-breeding gulls. He heard  
 The curlew piping ; saw a blackcock perch  
 Upon a dyke hard-by—a lordly bird

With queer curled tail. And soon they  
reached the edge—

The quaggy edge of Hallypike. And then  
The gulls rose at them screaming from the  
sedge

With flapping wings ; and for a while like  
men

They stood their ground among the quaking  
moss,

Until half-blinded by the dazzling white  
Of interweaving wings, and at a loss

Which way to turn, they only thought of  
flight

From those fierce cruel beaks and hungry  
eyes—

Yet stood transfixed, each on a quaking clump  
With hands to ears to shut out those wild  
cries.

Then the gulls closed on Phil ; and with a  
jump

And one shrill yell he'd plunged into the lake  
Half-crazed with terror. Only just in time  
He'd stumbled after through the quag aquake  
And caught him by the coat, and through  
black slime

Had dragged him into safety, far away  
From the horror of white wings and beaks  
and eyes.

And he remembered now how Philip lay  
Sobbing upon his bosom. . . .

Now those cries

Were threatening Phil again ; and he was  
    caught  
Blind in a beating, baffling, yelling hell  
Of wings and beaks and eyes. And there  
    was naught  
That he could do for him. . . .

                                Once more he fell  
Into the dead void of eternity,  
Lightless and aching, and his soul hung dead  
With wide-set staring eyes that still could see  
Those damning figures, burning hugely red  
On the low aching dome of the black heaven  
That crushed upon his temples — glaring  
    bright—

10,711—

Searing his eyeballs . . .

                                Then the pitchy night  
Rolled by . . .

                        And now that summer noon they sat  
In the shallows of Broomlee lake, the water  
    warm

About their chins, and talked of this and  
    that ;

And heeded nothing of the coming storm,  
Or the strange breathless stillness everywhere  
On which the dull note of the cuckoo fell  
Monotonously beating through dead air,  
A throbbing pulse of heat made audible.  
And even when the sky was brooding grey  
They'd slowly dressed, and started to walk  
    round

The mile-long lake ; but when they'd got  
half-way

A heavy fear fell on them, and they found  
That they were clutching hands. The still  
lough gleamed

Livid before them 'neath a livid sky

Sleek and unrippling. . . . Suddenly they  
screamed

And ran headlong for home, they knew not  
why—

Ran stumbling through the heath, and never  
stopped—

And still hot brooding horror on them pressed  
When they had climbed up Sewingshields, and  
dropped

Dead-beat beneath the dyke ; and on his  
breast

Poor frightened Phil had sobbed himself to  
sleep.

And even when the crashing thunder came,  
Phil snuggled close in slumber sound and  
deep ;

And he alone had watched the lightning flame  
Across the fells, and flash on Hallypike. . . .

And in his office chair he felt once more  
His back against the sharp stones of the dyke,  
And Phil's hot clutching arms . . .

. . . An outer door  
Banged in the wind, and roused him . . .

He was glad,

In spite of all, to think he'd trusted Phil.  
He'd got to see it through. . . .

He saw the lad,  
His little frightened brother crouching still  
Beneath the brooding horror of the sky—  
That he might take him in his arms once  
more !

Now he must pull himself together, ay !  
For there was some one tapping at the door.



## THE ELM

THE wind had caught the elm at last.  
He'd lain all night and wondered how  
'Twas bearing up against the blast :  
And it was down for ever now,  
Snapt like a match-stick. He, at dawn,  
Had risen from his sleepless bed  
And, hobbling to the window, drawn  
The blind up, and had seen, instead  
Of that brave tree against the sky,  
Thrust up into the windless blue  
A broken stump not ten feet high. . . .

And it was changed, the world he knew,  
The world he'd known since he, tip-toe,  
Had first looked out beneath the eaves,  
And seen that tree at dawn aglow,  
Soaring with all its countless leaves  
In their first glory of fresh green,  
Like a big flame above the mead.

How many mornings he had seen  
It soaring since—well, it would need

A better head to figure out  
Than his, now he was seventy-five,  
And failing fast without a doubt—  
The last of fifteen, left alive,  
That in that very room were born,  
Ay, and upon that very bed  
He'd left at daybreak.

Many a morn  
He'd seen it, stark against the red  
Of winter sunrise, or in Spring—  
Some April morning, dewy-clear,  
With all its green buds glittering  
In the first sunbeams, soaring sheer  
Out of low mist.

The morn he wed  
It seemed with glittering jewels hung. . . .

And fifty year his wife was dead—  
And she so merry-eyed and young. . . .

And it was black the night she died,  
Dead black against the starry sky,  
When he had flung the window wide  
Upon the night so crazily  
Instead of drawing down the blind  
As he had meant. He was so dazed,  
And fumbled so, he couldn't find  
The hasp to pull it to, though crazed  
To shut them out, that starry night,  
And that great funeral plume of black,  
So awful in the cold starlight.

He'd fumbled till they drew him back,  
And closed it for him. . . .

And for long  
At night he couldn't bear to see  
An elm against the stars.

'Twas wrong,  
He knew, to blame an innocent tree—  
Though some folk hated elms, and thought  
Them evil, for their great boughs fell  
So suddenly. . . .

George Stubbs was caught  
And crushed to death. You couldn't tell  
What brought that great bough crashing  
there,

Just where George sat—his cider-keg  
Raised to his lips—for all the air  
Was still as death . . . And just one leg  
Stuck silly-like out of the leaves  
When Seth waked up ten yards away,  
Where he'd been snoozing 'mid the sheaves.

'Twas queer-like ; but you couldn't say  
The tree itself had been to blame.  
That bough was rotten through and through,  
And would have fallen just the same  
Though George had not been there. . . .

'Twas true  
That undertakers mostly made  
Cheap coffins out of elm . . .

But he—  
Well, he could never feel afraid

Of any living thing. That tree,  
He'd seemed to hate it for a time  
After she'd died . . . And yet somehow  
You can't keep hating without rhyme  
Or reason any live thing.

Now

He grieved to see it, fallen low,  
With almost every branch and bough  
Smashed into splinters. All that snow,  
A dead-weight, and that heavy blast,  
Had dragged it down : and at his feet  
It lay, the mighty tree, at last.

And he could make its trunk his seat  
And rest awhile, this winter's noon  
In the warm sunshine. He could just  
Hobble so far. And very soon  
He'd lie as low himself. He'd trust  
His body to that wood.

Old tree,

So proud and brave this many a year,  
Now brought so low . . .

Ah ! there was he,

His grandson, Jo, with never a fear  
Riding a bough unbroken yet—  
A madcap, like his father, Jim !  
He'd teach him sense, if he could get  
Behind him with a stick, the limb !

## THE DOCTOR

HE'D soon be home. The car was running  
well,  
Considering what she'd been through, since  
the bell  
Tumbled him out again—just as his head  
Sank in the pillow, glad to get to bed  
After the last night's watching, and a day  
Of travelling snowy roads without a stay—  
To find the tall young shepherd at the door.

“The wife's gey bad in child-bed”—and no  
more  
He'd said till they were seated in the car,  
And he was asked, Where to? and was it far?  
“The Scalp,” he'd said—“some fifteen mile  
or so.”

And they'd set out through blinding squalls  
of snow  
To climb the hills. The car could scarcely  
crawl  
At times, she skidded so ; and with that squall

Clean in his eyes he scarcely saw to steer—  
His big lamps only lit a few yards clear.

But those young eyes beside him seemed to  
    pierce

The fifteen miles of smother fuming fierce  
Between the husband and his home—the light  
In that far bedroom window held his sight,  
As though he saw clean through the blinding  
    squall

To the little square stone steadying that held all  
His heart—so solitary, bleak, and grey  
Among the snowdrifts on the windy braise,  
Beyond the burn that, swollen, loud, and black,  
Threatened the single plank that kept the  
    track

Between them and the outside world secure.  
If that were gone when he got back, for sure  
They'd have to plunge waist-deep in that  
    black spate

And cling for life upon the old sheep-gate,  
If it were not gone too, to cross at all. . . .

And she! He saw the shadow on the wall  
Behind the bed, his mother's, as she bent  
To comfort Mary, for a moment spent  
By the long agony . . . That shadow seemed  
So black and threatening, and the candle  
    gleamed

So strangely in those wild bright eyes. . . .  
  They'd be

Lucky to reach the bank at all ; for he  
Had been through that burn once on such a  
    night,  
And he remembered how he'd had to fight  
The frothing flood, rolled over, beaten, bruised,  
And well-nigh dragged down under, though  
    well used  
To every mood and temper of the burn.

Yet, though he gazed so far, he missed no  
    turn  
In all those climbing miles of snow-blind way  
Until the car stopt dead by Gallows' Brae,  
And they'd to leave her underneath a dyke,  
And plunge knee-deep through drift-choked  
    slack and syke  
Until they reached the plank that still held  
    fast,  
Though quivering underfoot in that wild blast  
Like a stretched bow-string. Dizzily they  
    crossed  
Above that brawling blackness, torn and tossed  
To flashing spray about the lantern. Then,  
Setting their teeth, they took the brae, like  
    men  
At desperate hazard charging certain death ;  
And nigh the crest the doctor reeled, his  
    breath  
Knocked out of him, and sinking helplessly  
Knew nothing till he wakened drowsily  
Before the peat and found himself alone

In a strange kitchen.

But a heavy moan  
Just overhead recalled him, and he leapt  
Instantly to his feet, alert, and crept  
Upstairs with noiseless step until he came  
To the low bedroom where the candle flame  
Showed the old woman standing by the bed  
On which the young wife lay. His noiseless  
tread  
Scarce startling them, he paused a moment  
while  
Those strained white lips and wild eyes strove  
to smile  
Bravely and tenderly as the husband bent  
Over the bed to kiss her. When he went  
Without a word, closing the creaking door  
And creeping quietly downstairs, once more  
The room was filled with moaning.

. . . . .  
When at last  
His part was done, and danger safely past,  
And into a wintry world with lusty crying  
That little life had ventured, and was lying  
Beside the drowsy mother on the bed,  
Downstairs the doctor stole with noiseless  
tread,  
And, entering the kitchen quietly,  
Saw the young father gazing fearfully  
Into the fire with dazed, unseeing eyes.  
He spoke to him ; and still he did not rise,



But sat there staring with that senseless gaze  
Set on the peat that with a sudden blaze  
Lit up his drawn face, bloodless 'neath its tan.  
But when the doctor stooped and touched the  
man

Upon the shoulder, starting to his feet  
He staggered, almost falling in the peat,  
Whispering "She's safe! She's safe!"

And then he leapt  
Suddenly up the stair. The doctor crept  
Speedily after him without a sound;  
But when he reached the upper room he  
found

He wasn't needed. The young husband bent  
Over his wife and baby, quiet, content;  
Then the wife stirred, opening her eyes, and  
smiled,  
And they together looked upon their child.

The doctor drowsed till dawn beside the peat,  
Napping uneasily in the high-backed seat,  
Half-conscious of the storm that shook the  
pane

And rattled at the door. . . .

And now again  
He seemed to stand beside the lonely bed  
He'd stood beside last night—the old man,  
dead,

With staring eyes, dropt jaw, and rigid grin  
That held the stark white features, peaked  
and thin—

The old man, left alone, with not a friend  
To make his body seemly in the end,  
Or close his eyes . . .

And then the lusty cry  
Of that young baby screaming hungrily  
Broke through his dream.

. . . . .  
The car was running well.  
He'd soon be home, and sleeping—till the  
bell  
Should rouse him to a world of old men  
dying  
Alone, and hungry new-born babies crying.

## THE LAMP

SHE couldn't bring herself to bar the door—  
And him on the wrong side of it. Never-  
more  
She'd hear his footstep on the threshold-  
stone. . . .

“You're not afraid to lie all night alone,  
And Jim but newly drowned?” they'd asked;  
and she  
Had turned upon her neighbours wonderingly.  
“Afraid of what?” she said. “Afraid of  
him,”  
The neighbours answered. “Me—afraid of  
Jim!  
And after all these years!” she cried—“and  
he—  
How can you think that he'd bring harm to  
me?  
You know him better, surely, even you!  
And I . . .” Then they had left her, for  
they knew  
Too well that any word that they could say

Would help her nothing.

When they'd gone away,  
Leaving her to her trouble, she arose,  
And, taking from the kist his Sunday clothes,  
Folded so neatly, kept so carefully  
In camphor, free of moth, half-absently  
She shook them out, and hung them up to  
air

Before the fire upon his high-backed chair ;  
And then when they were aired she folded  
them

Carefully, seam to seam and hem to hem,  
And smoothing them with tender hands,  
again

She laid them in the kist where they had lain  
Six days a week for hard on forty year. . . .

Ay, forty year they'd shared each hope and  
fear—

They two, together—yet she might not tend  
With loving hands his body in the end !  
The sea had taken him from her. And she—  
She could do nothing for him now. The sea  
Had taken him from her. And nevermore  
Might she do anything for him. . . .

The door  
Flapped in the wind. She shut and sneaked  
it tight,

But did not bolt it. Then she set a light  
In the white-curtained window, where it shone  
As clearly as on each night that he had gone

Out with the boats in all that forty year,  
And each night she had watched it burning  
clear,

Alone and wakeful . . . and, though lonelier,  
She'd lie to-night as many a night she'd lain  
On her left side, with face turned towards  
the pane,

So that, if she should wake, at once she'd see  
If still her beacon-light burned steadily,  
Feeling that, maybe, somewhere in the night  
Of those dark waters he could see the light  
Far off and very dim, a little spark  
Of comfort burning for him in the dark ;  
And, even though it should dwindle from his  
sight,

It seemed to her that he must feel the light  
Burning within his heart, the light of  
home. . . .

From those black cruel waters sudden foam  
Flashed as she gazed ; and with a shuddering  
stir,

As though cold drowning waves went over her,  
She stood a moment gasping. Then she  
turned

From the bright window where her watch-  
light burned

And, taking off her clothes, crept into bed  
To see if she could sleep. But when her head  
Touched the cold pillow, such hot restlessness  
She felt, she'd half a mind to rise and dress

Each moment, as she tossed from side to side.

The bed to-night seemed very big and wide  
And hard and cold to her, though a hot ache  
Held her whole body tingling wide awake,  
Turning and tossing half the endless night.

Then quieter she lay, and watched the light  
Burning so steadily, until the flame  
Dazzled her eyes, and golden memories came  
Out of the past to comfort her. She lay  
Remembering—remembering that day  
Nigh twenty year since when she'd thought  
him drowned,  
And after all . . .

She heard again the sound  
Of seas that swept a solid wall of green,  
Such seas as living eye had never seen,  
Over the rock-bound harbour, with a roar  
Rushing the beach, tossing against the door  
Driftwood and old cork-floats, slashing the  
pane

With flying weed again and yet again,  
As toppling to disaster, sea on sea  
Beneath that crashing wind broke furiously  
Almost upon the very threshold-stone  
In white, tumultuous thunder. All alone  
She watched through that long morn : too  
much afraid

To stir or do a hand's turn, her heart prayed  
One prayer unceasingly, though not a word

Escaped her lips, till in a lull she heard  
A neighbour call out that the "Morning Star"  
Had gone ashore somewhere beyond Hell  
Scar,

Hard by the Wick, and all . . . and then  
the roar

Drowned everything . . .

And how she reached the door  
She never knew. She found herself outside  
Suddenly face to face with that mad tide,  
Battling for breath against a wind that fought  
Each inch with her, as she turned north, and  
caught

Her bodily, and flung her reeling back  
A dozen times before she reached the track  
That runs along the crag-top to the Head.  
Bent double, still she struggled on, half dead,  
For not a moment could she stand upright  
Against that wind, striving with all her might  
To reach the Wick. She struggled through  
that wind

As through cold clinging water, deaf and  
blind ;

And numb and heavy in that icy air  
Her battered body felt, as though, stark-bare,  
She floundered in deep seas. Once in a lull  
Flat on her face she fell ; a startled gull  
Rose skirling at her ; and with burning eyes  
She lay a moment, far too scared to rise,  
Staring into a gully, black as night,  
In which the seething waters frothing white

Thundered from crag to crag, and baffled  
leapt

A hundred feet in air. She'd nearly stepped  
Into that gully. Just in time the wind  
Had dropt. One moment more, and head-  
long, blind,

She'd tumbled into that pit of death . . .  
and Jim,

If he were living yet . . .

The thought of him  
Startled her to her feet ; and on once more  
Against a fiercer wind along the shore  
She struggled with set teeth, and dragging  
hair

Drenched in the sousing spray that leapt in  
air

Spinning and hissing, smiting her like hail.

Then when it almost seemed that she must fail  
To reach the Wick, alive or dead, she found  
That she was there already. To the ground  
She sank, dead-beat. Almost too faint and  
weak

To lift her head, her wild eyes sought the  
creek ;

But there she saw no sign of boat or man—  
Only a furious smother of seas that ran  
Along the slanting jetty ceaselessly.

Groping for life, she searched that spummy sea  
For sail or sign in vain ; then knew no  
more . . .



Till she was lifted by strong arms that bore  
Her safely through the storm, lying at rest  
Without a care upon her husband's breast  
Unquestioning till she reached home, content  
To feel his arms about her, as he bent  
Over her tenderly and breathed her name.

And then she heard how, back from death,  
    he came  
Unscathed to her, by some strange mercy  
    thrown  
Alive almost upon his threshold-stone ;  
When, hearing where she'd gone, he'd  
    followed her  
Hot-foot. . . .

    The breath of dawn began to blur  
The shining pane with mist . . . And never-  
    more  
His foot would follow her along that shore.  
The sea had taken him from her, at last,  
Had taken him to keep. . . .

    Then from the past  
She waked with eyes that looked beyond the  
    light,  
Still burning clearly, into the lingering night,  
Black yet, beyond the streaming window-  
    pane  
Down which big glistening drops of gentle  
    rain  
Trickled until they dazzled her ; and she lay  
Again remembering—how ere break of day

When she was young she'd had to rise and  
go  
Along the crag-top some five mile or so,  
With other lads and lasses, to Skateraw  
To gather bait. . . .

Again her young eyes saw  
Those silent figures with their creels, dead-  
black  
Against the stars, climbing the sheer cliff-  
track

In single file before her, or quite bright  
As suddenly the lighthouse flashed its light  
Full on them, stepping up out of the night  
On to the day-bright crag-top—kindling  
white,

A moment, windy hair and streaming grass.  
Again she trudged, a drowsy little lass,  
The youngest of them all, across dim fields  
By sleeping farms and ruined, roofless bields,  
Frightened by angry dogs that, roused from  
sleep,

Yelped after them, or by a startled sheep  
That scurried by her suddenly, while she  
Was staring at a ship's lights out at sea  
With dreaming eyes, or counting countless  
stars

That twinkled bright beyond the jagged  
scars ;

Or stumbled over a slippery shingle-beach  
Beneath her creel, and shuddered at the  
screech

And sudden clamour of wings that round her  
flapped.

Again she felt that cruel cold ; though hapt  
In the big shawl, the raw wind searched her  
through

Till every bone ached. Then once more she  
knew

Brief respite when at last they reached Skateraw  
And rested till the dawn.

Again she saw  
Those dark groups sitting quiet in the night  
Awaiting the first blink of morning light  
To set to work gathering the bait, while she  
Sang to them as they sat beside the sea.  
They always made her sing, for she'd a voice  
When she was young, she had, and such a  
choice

Of words and airs by heart ; and she was glad  
To turn a tune for any lass or lad

Who'd ask her, always glad to hear them say :  
"Come, Singing Sally, give us 'Duncan  
Gray,'

'The De'il among the Tailors,' 'Elsie Marley,'  
'The Keel-Row' or 'The Wind among  
the Barley' "—

And always gladdest when 'twas Jim would ask.

Again, as they would settle to their task  
Of gathering clammy mussels, that cold ache  
Stole through her bones. It seemed her back  
must break

Each time she stooped or lifted up her head,  
Though still she worked with fingers raw and  
red

Until her creel was filled. But, toiling back,  
Staggering beneath her load along the track,  
Jim would come up with her and take her  
creel

And bear it for her, if she'd sing a reel  
To keep their hearts up as they trudged along.  
Half-numb with sleep, she'd start a dancing-  
song,

And sing, the fresh wind blowing in her face,  
Until the dancing blood began to race  
Through her young body, and her heart grew  
light,

Forgetting all the labours of the night. . . .

Once more she walked light-foot to that gay  
air,

The wind of morning fresh on face and hair,  
A girl again . . .

And Jim, 'twas always he  
Who bore her burden for her. . . .

Quietly

With eyes upon the golden lamp she lay,  
While, all unseen of her, the winter day  
Behind the dim wet pane broke bleak and  
cold.

She seemed to look upon a dawn of gold  
That kindled every dancing wave to glee

As she walked homeward singing by the sea,  
As she walked homeward with the windy stir  
Fresh in her flying hair, and over her  
Jim leant—young lucky Jim—a kindly lad  
Taking the creel; and her girl's heart was  
glad

As . . .

. . . clasped within each other's arms,  
the deep  
Closed over them . . .

Smiling, she fell asleep.

## THE PLATELAYER

TAPPING the rails as he went by,  
And driving the slack wedges tight,  
He walked towards the morning sky  
Between two golden lines of light  
That dwindled slowly into one  
Sheer golden rail that ran right on  
Over the fells into the sun.

And dazzling in his eyes it shone,  
That golden track, as left and right  
He swung his clinking hammer—ay,  
'Twas dazzling after that long night  
In Hindfell tunnel, working by  
A smoky flare, and making good  
The track the rains had torn . . .

Clink, clink,  
On the sound metal—on the wood  
A duller thwack !

It made him blink,  
That running gold . . .  
'Twas sixteen hours  
Since he'd left home—his garden smelt

So fragrant with the heavy showers  
When he left home—and now he felt  
That it would smell more fresh and sweet  
After the tunnel's reek and fume  
Of damp, warm cinders. 'Twas a treat  
To come upon the scent and bloom  
That topped the cutting by the wood  
After the cinders of the track,  
The cinders and tarred sleepers—good  
To lift your eyes from gritty black  
Upon that blaze of green and red . . .  
And she'd be waiting by the fence,  
And with the baby . . .

Straight for bed

He'd make, if he had any sense,  
And sleep the day ; but, like as not,  
When he'd had breakfast, he'd turn to  
And hoe the back potato-plot—  
'Twould be one mass of weeds, he knew.  
You'd think each single drop of rain  
Turned as it fell into a weed ;  
You seemed to hoe and hoe in vain.  
Chickweed and groundsel didn't heed  
The likes of him—and bindweed, well,  
You hoed and hoed, still its white roots  
Ran deeper. . . .

'Twould be good to smell  
The fresh-turned earth, and feel his boots  
Sink deep into the brown, wet mould  
After hard cinders. . . .

And, maybe,





Open for them : so snug and warm  
They slept or chattered, while he stood  
And faced all night that raking storm—  
The little house beside the wood  
For ever in his thoughts, and he  
Not knowing what was happening. . . .

But all went well as well could be  
With Sally and the little thing ;  
And it had been worth while to wait  
Through that long night with work to do,  
To meet his mother at the gate  
With such good news, and find it true,  
Ay, truer than the truth.

He still  
Could see his wife's eyes as he bent  
Over the bairn . . .

The Devil's Ghyll  
Had done its worst, and he was spent ;  
But he'd have faced a thousand such  
Wild nights as thon to see that smile  
Again, and feel that tender touch  
Upon his cheek.

'Twas well worth while  
With such reward. And it was strange  
The difference such a little thing  
Could make to them—how it could change  
Their whole life for them, and could bring  
Such happiness to them, though they  
Had seemed as happy as could be  
Before it came to them.

The day  
Was shaping well. And there was she  
The lassie sleeping quietly  
Within her arms, beside the gate.

The storm had split that lilac-tree ;  
But he was tired, and it must wait.

## MAKESHIFTS

AND after all, 'twas snug and weather-tight,  
His garret. That was much on such a night—  
To be secure against the wind and sleet  
At his age, and not wandering the street,  
A shuffling, shivering bag-of-bones.

And yet  
Things would be snugger if he could forget  
The bundle of old dripping rags that slouched  
Before him down the Canongate, and crouched  
Close to the swing-doors of the Spotted Cow.  
Why, he could see that poor old sinner now,  
Ay, and could draw him, if he'd had the  
knack

Of drawing anything—a steamy, black  
Dilapidation, basking in the glare,  
And sniffing with his swollen nose in air  
To catch the hot reek when the door swings  
wide

And shows the glittering paradise inside,  
Where men drink golden fire on seats of plush,  
Lolling like gods: he stands there in the  
slush

Shivering, from squelching boots to sopping  
hat

One sodden clout, and blinking like a bat  
Bedazzled by the blaze of light ; his beard  
Waggles and drips from lank cheeks pocked  
and seared,

And the whole dismal night about him drips  
As he stands gaping there with watering lips  
And burning eyes in the cold, sleety drench,  
Afire with thirst that only death may quench.

Yet he had clutched the sixpence greedily,  
As if sixpennyworth of rum maybe  
Would satisfy that thirst. Who knows ! It  
might

Just do the trick perhaps on such a night,  
And death would be a golden, fiery drink  
To that old scarecrow. 'Twould be good to  
think

His money 'd satisfied that thirst, and brought  
Rest to those restless, fevered bones that ought  
Long since to have dropped for ever out of  
sight.

It wasn't decent, wandering the night  
Like that—not decent. While it lived it  
made

A man turn hot to see it, and afraid  
To look it in the face lest he should find  
That bundle was himself, grown old and  
blind

With thirst unsatisfied.

He'd thirsted, too,  
His whole life long, though not for any brew  
That trickled out of taps in gaudy bars  
For those with greasy pence to spend !

The stars  
Were not for purchase, neither bought nor  
sold  
By any man for silver or for gold.

Still, he was snug and sheltered from the  
storm ;

He sat by his own hearth secure and warm,  
And that was much indeed on such a night.  
The little room was pleasant with the light  
Glowing on lime-washed walls, kindling to  
red

His copper pots, and, over the white bed,  
The old torn Rembrandt print to golden  
gloom.

'Twas much on such a night to have a room—  
Four walls and ceiling storm-tight overhead.  
Denied the stars—well, you must spend instead  
Your sixpences on makeshifts. Life was  
naught

But toiling for the sixpences that bought  
Makeshifts for stars.

'Twas snug to hear the sleet  
Lashing the panes and sweeping down the  
street

Towards Holyrood and out into the night  
Of hills beyond. Maybe it would be white

On Arthur's Seat to-morrow, white with snow—  
A white hill shining in the morning glow  
Beyond the chimney-pots—that was a sight  
For any man to see, a snowy height  
Soaring into the sunshine. He was glad,  
Though he must live in slums, his garret had  
A window to the hills.

And he was warm,  
Ay, warm and snug, shut in here from the  
storm.

The sixpences bought comfort for old bones  
That else must crouch all night on paving-  
stones  
Unsheltered from the cold.

'Twas hard to learn  
In his young days that this was life—to earn  
By life-long labour just your board and bed—  
Although the stars were singing overhead,  
The sons of morning singing together for joy  
As they had sung for every bright-eyed boy  
With ears to hear since life itself was young—  
And leave so much unseen, so much unsung.

He'd had to learn that lesson. 'Twas no  
good

To go star-gazing for a livelihood  
With empty belly. Though he had a turn  
For seeing things, when you have got to earn  
Your daily bread first, there is little time  
To paint your dream or set the stars to  
rhyme—

Nay, though you have the vision and the  
skill

You cannot draw the outline of a hill  
To please yourself when you get home half  
dead

After the day's work—hammers in your head  
Still tapping, tapping. . . .

Always mad to draw  
The living shape of everything he saw  
He'd had to spend his utmost skill and  
strength

Learning a trade to live by, till at length,  
Now he'd the leisure, the old skill was dead.

Born for a painter, as it seemed, instead  
He'd spent his life upholstering furniture.  
'Twas natural enough men should prefer  
Upholstery to pictures, and their ease  
To little coloured daubs of cows and trees.  
He didn't blame them, 'twas no fault of theirs  
That they saw life in terms of easy-chairs,  
And heaven, like that old sinner in the slush,  
A glittering bar upholstered in red plush.

'Twas strange to look back on it now, his  
life . . .

His father, married to a second wife ;  
And home, no home for him since he could  
mind,

Save when the starry vision made him blind  
To all about him, and he walked on air

For days together, and without a care. . . .  
But as the years passed, seldomer they came  
Those starry, dazzling nights and days aflame,  
And oftener a sudden gloom would drop  
Upon him, drudging all day in the shop  
With his young brother John—John always  
    gay,  
Taking things as they came, the easy way,  
Not minding overmuch if things went wrong  
At home, and always humming a new  
    song. . . .

And then she came into his life, and shook  
All heaven about him. He had but to look  
On her to find the stars within his reach.  
But, ere his love had trembled into speech,  
He'd waked one day to know that not for  
    him  
Were those bright living eyes that turned  
    dreams dim—  
To know that, while he'd worshipped, John  
    and she  
Had taken to each other easily. . . .

But that was years ago . . . and now he sat  
Beside a lonely hearth. And they were fat—  
Ay, fat and old they were, John and his  
    wife,  
And with a grown-up family. Their life  
Had not been over-easy : they'd their share  
Of trouble, ay, more than enough to spare :



But they had made the best of things, and  
taken

Life as it came with courage still unshaken.  
They'd faced their luck, but never gone half-  
way

To meet fresh trouble. Life was always gay  
For them between the showers : the roughest  
weather

Might do its worst—they always stood  
together

To bear the brunt, together stood their  
ground

And came through smiling cheerfully. They'd  
found

Marriage a hard-up, happy business  
Of hand-to-mouth existence more or less,  
But taking all in all, well worth their while  
To look on the bright side of things—to smile  
When all went well, not fearing overmuch  
When life was suddenly brought to the touch  
And you'd to sink or swim. And they'd  
kept hold,

And even now, though they were fat and old,  
They'd still a hearty grip on life. . . .

They'd be

Sitting there in their kitchen after tea  
On either side the fireplace even now—  
Jane with her spectacles upon her brow,  
And nodding as she knitted, listening  
While John, in shirt-sleeves, scraped his  
fiddle-string,

With one ear hearkening lest a foot should  
stop  
And some rare customer invade the shop  
To ask the price of that old Flanders chest  
Or oaken ale-house settle. . . .

They'd the best  
Of life, maybe, together. . . .

And yet he,  
Though he'd not taken life so easily,  
Had always hated makeshifts more or less,  
Grudging to swop the stars for sixpences,  
And was an old man now, with that old  
thirst

Unsatisfied—ay, even at the worst  
He'd had his compensations, now and then  
A starry glimpse. You couldn't work with  
men

And quite forget the stars. Though life was  
spent

In drudgery, it hadn't only meant  
Upholstering chairs in crimson plush for  
bars. . . .

Maybe it gave new meaning to the stars,  
The drudgery, who knows!

At least the rare  
Wild glimpses he had caught at whiles were  
there

Yet living in his mind. When much was  
dim,

And drudgery forgotten, bright for him  
Burned even now in memory old delights

That had been his in other days and nights.  
He'd always seen, though never could express  
His eyes' delight, or only more or less ;  
But things once clearly seen, once and for all  
The soul's possessions—naught that may befall  
May ever dim, and neither moth nor rust  
Corrupt the dream that, shedding mortal dust,  
Has soared to life and spread its wings of gold  
Within the soul. . . .

And yet when they were told,  
These deathless visions, little things they  
seemed,  
Though something of the beauty he had  
dreamed  
Burned in them, something of his youth's  
desire. . . .

And as he sat there, gazing at the fire—  
Once more he lingered, listening in the gloom  
Of that great silent warehouse, in the room  
Where stores were kept, one hand upon a  
shelf,  
And heard a lassie singing to herself  
Somewhere unseen without a thought who  
heard,  
Just singing to herself like any bird  
Because the heart was happy in her breast,  
As happy as the day was long. At rest  
He lingered, listening, and a ray of light  
Streamed from the dormer-window up a  
height

Down on the bales of crimson cloth, and lit  
To sudden gold the dust that danced in it,  
Till he was dazzled by the golden motes  
That kept on dancing to those merry notes  
Before his dreaming eyes, and danced as long  
As he stood listening to the lassie's song. . . .

Then once again, his work-bag on his back,  
He climbed that April morning up the track  
That took you by a short cut through the  
wood

Up to the hill-top where the great house  
stood,

When suddenly beyond the firs' thick night  
He saw a young fawn frisking in the light :  
Shaking the dew-drops in a silver rain  
From off his dappled hide, he leapt again  
As though he'd jump out of his skin for  
joy.

With laughing eyes, light-hearted as a boy,  
He watched the creature unaware of him  
Quivering with eager life in every limb,  
Leaping and frisking on the dewy green  
Beneath the flourish of the snowy gean,  
While every now and then the long ears  
pricked,

And budding horns, as he leapt higher,  
flicked

The drooping clusters of wild-cherry bloom,  
Shaking their snow about him. From the  
gloom

Of those dark wintry firs, his eyes had won  
A sight of April sporting in the sun—  
Young April leaping to its heart's delight  
Among the dew beneath the boughs of  
white. . . .

And there'd been days among the hills, rare  
days  
And rarer nights among the heathery ways—  
Rare golden holidays when he had been  
Alone in the great solitude of green  
Wave-crested hills, a rolling shoreless sea  
Flowing for ever through eternity—  
A sea of grasses, streaming without rest  
Beneath the great wind blowing from the  
west,  
Over which cloud shadows sailed and swept  
away  
Beyond the world's edge all the summer day.

The hills had been his refuge, his delight,  
Seen or unseen, through many a day or  
night.

His help was of the hills, steadfast, serene  
In their eternal strength, those shapes of green  
Sublimely moulded.

Whatsoever his skill,  
No man had ever rightly drawn a hill  
To his mind—never caught the subtle curves  
Of sweeping moorland with its dips and  
swerves—

Nor ever painted heather. . . .

Heather came  
Always into his mind like sudden flame,  
Blazing and streaming over stony braes  
As he had seen it on that day of days  
When he had plunged into a sea of bloom,  
Blinded with colour, stifled with the fume  
Of sun-soaked blossom, the hot, heady scent  
Of honey-breathing bells, and sunk content  
Into a soft and scented bed to sleep ;  
And he had lain in slumber sweet and deep,  
And only wakened when the full moon's light  
Had turned that wavy sea of heather white ;  
And still he'd lain within the full moon blaze  
Hour after hour bewildered and adaze  
As though enchanted—in a waking swoon  
He'd lain within the full glare of the moon  
Until she seemed to shine on him alone  
In all the world—as though his body 'd grown  
Until it covered all the earth, and he  
Was swaying like the moon-enchanted sea  
Beneath that cold, white witchery of light . . .  
And now, the earth itself, he hung in night  
Turning and turning in that cold, white glare  
For ever and for ever. . . .

She was there—  
There at his window now, the moon. The  
sleet  
And wind no longer swept the quiet street.  
And he was cold : the fire had burnt quite  
low :

And, while he'd dreamt, there'd been a fall of  
snow.

He wondered where that poor old man would  
hide

His head to-night with thirst unsatisfied. . . .

His thirst, who knows! but night may  
quench the thirst

Day leaves unsatisfied. . . .

Well, he must first  
Get to his bed and sleep away the night,  
If he would rise to see the hills still white  
In the first glory of the morning light.

1914-16.

THE END







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